

DISCOURSES

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

VOL. III.

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TWENTY

DISCOURS

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VARIOUS SUBJECTS

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BY WILLIAM CRAIG D.D.

MINISTER OF ST. ANDREW, EDINBURGH

VOL. II.

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V A R I O U S S U B J E C T S.

By WILLIAM CRAIG, D.D.
MINISTER OF ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, GLASGOW.

V O L. III.

L O N D O N:
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DISCOURSE XIV.

The One Thing Needful.

LUKE x. 41, 42.

And Jesus answered and said, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things : but one thing is needful ; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

OUR blessed Saviour fully understood the worth of the soul of man, and the importance of that life and immortality for which it was originally designed, and which he himself had clearly brought to

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light.

light. *To seek and save the soul when it was lost*, was the great intention of his coming to this world, and of all the instructions which he delivered to mankind. The passage of his life to which the text refers sets his view of this matter in a very strong light. *He had come to visit Mary and Martha, the two sisters of Lazarus, at their house. Martha, as a mark of her regard,* employed her whole attention in preparing a proper entertainment for him. *She was cumbered about much serving.* Mary, neglecting this external service, listened, with a deep attention, to the religious instructions which he gave. *She sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.* Jesus observing the different reception which the two sisters gave him at their house, applauded Mary's conduct, and reproved the conduct of her sister Martha, in this manner, *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall*

not be taken from her. Although the care which Martha had employed to entertain him in a proper manner, proceeded from respect ; yet our Saviour made no account of it, as it proceeded not from that idea of his character in which only he was desirous of being regarded and esteemed, viz. that of being a teacher sent from God, and the Saviour of the world. The conduct of her sister Mary, who neglecting this external service and respect, was solicitous only to receive the instructions he had brought from God ; as it proceeded from a just idea of his character, and discovered that attention and regard which he was desirous to obtain, was therefore marked by him with approbation and esteem.

From this passage of our Saviour's life, it is proposed, in the following discourse, to consider the importance of religion and the care of our immortal souls, when it is compared with all those other interests of life about which men are apt to be careful

and troubled. Our Saviour had a full conception of its vast importance, when he called it *the one thing needful, and the good part which shall not be taken from us*; compared with this, he insinuates that all the other interests of life are very small and inconsiderable.

To illustrate the subject fully, it is proper to observe, that men may be considered in two different lights; either 1st, as inhabitants of this present world; or 2dly, as designed by their Creator to be the inhabitants of another, and eternal world: and that consequently, the importance of religion may be considered, either as it is conducive to their happiness and comfort in this present life, or as the necessary mean of their eternal happiness beyond the grave. It is chiefly, in the last of these respects we have proposed to consider the subject in this discourse; as it was probably in this view that our Saviour addressed these words to Martha, *One thing is needful*. It
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may not, however, be improper to premise a few remarks on the importance of religion, considered in the first of these respects.

Let a man sit down to examine with the utmost accuracy and attention in his power the different springs of happiness and pleasure, implanted in the human breast; let him calmly judge, either from the constitution of his own nature, or from the history and experience of the world, what is able to afford the mind of man the highest satisfaction and enjoyment; and he will undoubtedly perceive that it must arise from the two following particulars. First, from the testimony and peace of an approving conscience, whereby *a good man is satisfied from himself*. Secondly, from confidence in God, as his Almighty friend and the approver of his conduct. From these two sources the good man draws a satisfaction and enjoyment, far superior to what he can receive from any or from all the

outward objects of this world ; an enjoyment which is constant and immovable, independent on the ever varying accidents of human life ; and (which is a circumstance of infinite importance, in our present situation) an enjoyment that opens to the soul the sweetest consolation and support, in the seasons of adversity, and at the hour of death. The holy psalmist thus describes his experience of the matter : † *There be many that say who will shew us any good : Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than when their corn and wine increased.*

Now it must be obvious to every one, that these important springs of happiness are opened in the heart of man by religion only, or what our Saviour here calls, *the one thing needful, and the good part*. The religious and good man alone can be thus satisfied, from himself ; and his heart not condemning him, he alone hath confidence in

† Ps. iv. 6.

The One Thing Needful.

God. Hence the wise King, after he had made trial of every human pleasure, thus finishes his estimate, * *Fear God, and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole law of man :* compared with this, he declares that every project or enjoyment upon earth is frivolous and vain.

It is true, that *men of the world* think themselves sufficiently happy from the things which they possess, and therefore ask no more but the continuance and increase of their possessions. They find nothing in them (they pretend) of that emptiness or vanity which the teachers of religion talk so much about, and therefore disregard the instructions that are given on this subject, as fanciful and useless declamation. Such persons ought, however, calmly to inquire, if the happiness which they enjoy, and with which they now satisfy themselves, be not rather fanciful ; owing all its power to a false artificial importance which they give,

• Eccl. xii. 13.

in their own imaginations, to the objects from which it is derived; and if, of consequence, all their happiness must not immediately expire, when they come to see the artifice and falsehood by which they were deceived. That this is really the nature and state of their enjoyments, sufficiently appears from the experience of life. The appetites or fancies by which men are prompted to pursue the external interests and pleasures of the world are, in their nature, transient and mutable, and are often changed; and whenever they are changed, then do all those interests and pleasures entirely lose their charm and become insipid and contemptible. Thus, the toys which give a child the highest entertainment, are neglected and despised when he passes from the period of childhood. The pleasures that succeed and are followed in the earlier years of manhood, are, in like manner, deserted and despised when he arrives at the grayer and more thoughtful periods

periods of life. The projects and enjoyments of the *man* in those riper years are, in their turn, neglected and despised, as he verges towards the extremity of age.

Thus it is the force of present appetite or fancy, arising in those different and successive periods of life that gives the whole influence and charm to the different and successive enjoyments of the world. When the fancy or appetite subsides, the charm of the enjoyment is dissolved. Did men, therefore, view the whole series of human pleasures from their earliest childhood to the last extremity of age ; in that state of mind, and in that point of light in which they ought to be considered by a reasonable and immortal creature, they would undoubtedly regard them (when compared with the enjoyments for which their reasonable natures were designed, and which religion is intended to conduct them to,) with that same indifference, where-with *we* now regard the pleasures which
were

were relished, in some former period of life; but for which our taste and appetite is gone.—Viewing the capacities of man, and the noble purposes for which his faculties were given him, the external transitory pleasures of the world would appear to us in the same light in which a man in riper age reflects upon the toys and trifles of a child.

It is argued, I know, *by men of the world*, in defence of their enjoyments, that whether they proceed from a rational, or fanciful conception of their nature and importance, they however afford them a real happiness and satisfaction; an happiness, with which they are content, and wherein they are unwilling to be interrupted, or disturbed.—Just so, are children satisfied with the trifles and toys of childhood, are displeased and fretted, when we attempt to interrupt their frivolous amusements, with a view to lead them to the worthier pursuits and enjoyments of maturer age. But
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do we therefore approve, or gratify their childishness and folly; or could a worse thing befall them, than to be suffered to proceed to the end of life in the frivolous amusements of their earlier years?

From the observations that have been suggested, it sufficiently appears, that religion is *the one thing needful*, or an object of the first importance, although we were to consider mankind in no other light, than as inhabitants of this present world. In the course of a religious life, a man enjoys the peaceful approbation of his own heart, an humble confidence in God, and the delightful prospect of a blessed immortality. In a different course of life, he must either suffer the reproach and condemnation of a guilty conscience; or, to prevent it, he must live in perpetual absence from himself. He must, withal, separate himself from God, and live a total stranger to the comforts of his friendship. Being *without God in the world, he is therefore without hope.* No
man

man who takes a calm survey of these two different ways of life, will hesitate a moment in determining which of them is fitted to afford the highest satisfaction and enjoyment.

After all, however, that can be offered to shew the superior advantages and comforts that proceed from a religious life; it is contended by those who are unfriendly to religion, that the happiness of life does not lie in any one precise determined thing, but varies, and is different, according to the different imaginations and tastes of men concerning it. They allow that the pious man may feel satisfaction and delight in the exercises of religion; but, as for themselves, they have got a different taste of life; and tastes, they say, are not to be disputed. This account of happiness is so opposite to the common sense of mankind, is so often and strongly contradicted in the experience of life, that it would not deserve our notice in this place, were it not often to be

met with in the conversation of the world; and, indeed, seems to be one of those *imaginations, and high things*, of which the apostle * speaks, *That exalt themselves against the knowledge of God*, and the obedience of Jesus Christ.

To set this matter in its proper light, let it be observed, that if nothing more is meant, by the above account, than this; that men are led by their different inclinations, and tastes of life, to different and opposite enjoyments; that the highest enjoyment they are capable of receiving, consists in the gratification of their present taste, (so long as it remains) and that in their present state of mind, nothing else can give them any real happiness or pleasure; all this is true, but nothing to the purpose with a view to which it is alleged. The material question still remains to be determined: is there not a difference, an important difference, to be observed amongst

* 2 Cor. x. 5.

the several kinds of happiness or pleasure, of which the mind of man is capable, when the proper disposition and relish for receiving them is once acquired? Are not some of them more excellent in their nature, and afford a more complete and exquisite enjoyment; and, withal, more permanent and durable? If this is found to be the case, from thence we must conclude, that, independent upon fancy, there is a true and a false relish of happiness and pleasure; and a reason given from the frame and constitution of our nature, for distinguishing and making a proper choice amongst the different enjoyments of which we are susceptible. Were the matter otherwise, was every pleasure to be deemed of equal worth, and the worth of it to be determined, only by the appetite and relish of the man by whom it is received, we should, from thence, conclude, that the worthiest and meanest of the human race; a savage in the woods, or a sot in his solitary debauch,

debauch, or a tyrant in the indulgence of his cruelty, is as happy as the patriot or hero, when he redeems his country from servitude and misery; as the compassionate and generous lover of mankind, when he delivers the poor that cry, and causes the widow and the fatherless to sing for joy; or the saint of God, when he triumphs in the full assurance of his Maker's friendship, and the immediate prospect of a glorious immortality. But the man who can perceive no ground of preference amongst these different enjoyments, must have entirely lost the understanding and perceptions of a man: in the language of the apostle Paul*, *He is lost, the god of this world hath blinded him, lest the light should shine into his mind.*

Having considered the one thing needful, as it stands connected with the happiness and comfort of this present life, we are, in the following part of the discourse to con-

* 2 Cor. iv. 4.

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sider the importance of it, in the view of its connexion with our happiness in the eternal world. It is chiefly in this light that the scriptures represent the importance of religion, and call upon us to make it the object of our attention and concern. Thus the wise king :
** Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter ; Fear God, and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole of man. For God will bring every work unto judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.* Thus the apostle Paul : *† Wherefore we labour, that present or absent we may be accepted of him ; for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ; that every man may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.* In the same light our Saviour put the question ; *§ What shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his soul ; or what shall a man give in*

** Eccl. xii. 13.*

† 2 Cor. v. 9.

§ Mat. xvi. 26.

exchange for his soul. In the same light he undoubtedly meant to deliver the instruction in the text ; *One thing is needful.*

The reason why this present world appears to be of so much moment and importance in the eyes of men is, that they consider themselves only in the light of their connexion with it, and but seldom or never view themselves as connected with another and eternal world, in which their happiness or misery is to be determined by their conduct in this present life. Did we calmly view ourselves in this light, and lay our hearts open to the just and full impression of this solemn and affecting view, religion would appear before us with astonishing importance ; and a strange revolution would ensue in our estimate of all the objects and enjoyments of this world. Those pursuits and interests which are now esteemed of the highest moment would shrink before us into amazing insignificance, and those which are neglected

or despised would rise to as amazing an importance. The persons who we are now disposed to envy or admire, would appear to be rather objects of our pity : those whom we regard with pity or contempt, would appear to be the properest objects of our envy. When the rich man, described by our Saviour in the gospel *, *was clothed in fine linen and fared sumptuously every day, when Lazarus sat before his gate in all the circumstances of outward indigence and misery ; the former we may believe was envied and admired, the latter pitied or despised. But alas ! how erroneous was the judgment of the world concerning them. The sequel of their story sufficiently declares it ; when the rich man died he lift up his eyes in hell, being in torments, whilst Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom.*

Let us then consider ourselves, and the world in which we live, in their connexion with eternity ; and be assured, that till we

* Luke xvi. 19,

take this view of them they cannot be perceived in their true and proper light. There is but one position or point of view in which a portrait, landscape, or any other visible object can be placed, in order to form a just idea of its figure or design : in like manner we can form no just idea of the right conduct and design of human life, but by placing it in the light of its connexion with eternity. Till we enter calmly into this view of it, all the judgments which we form, either of ourselves or of our different pursuits and enjoyments in this world, are but the mistaken apprehensions or deceits of human fancy : they resemble those images which pass before us in a dream ; or, what is worse, they are the dreams of happiness and pleasure which a man conceives in sleep, when he ought to be awake and active to save himself from misery. A captive bound in chains dreams he is a prince, when he ought to be employed in redeeming himself from slavery.

A man in immediate danger of perishing by shipwreck, dreams he is in a safe and delicious abode, when he should be exerting his activity to save himself from perishing. Such is the state of every man, according to the views that are given us in the gospel, who satisfies himself with the interests and pleasures of this world, inattentive to the approach of a future judgment and eternal world. Surely, says the psalmist, ** thou didst set them, i. e. (the wicked who prosper in the world) in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation in a moment; they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest thou shalt despise their image!*

Things appear either great or little to the mind of man, according to the reference which they bear, or the comparison that is made of them to other things with which nature hath connected them. To

* Ps. lxxiii. 18.

creatures whose existence lasts but for a day, the duration of an hour must be deemed a considerable period. To creatures that exist through the compass of a year the duration of an hour is a much less considerable thing. To one who exists for sixty, eighty, or an hundred years, the same duration of an hour must appear scarcely of any consequence at all. On the same natural sense of things, the whole of our existence in this world for sixty, eighty, or an hundred years, must appear a very little thing to him who views it in the light of its connexion with eternity.

Would a man of common understanding who believed he was to live an hundred years, reckon it of any consequence to be assured, that for a day, a month, or even for a year, the happiness and comfort of his life was sufficiently secured ; whilst, at the same time, he was kept entirely ignorant what was to be his situation during all the other periods of his life. The

same, or a much more indifferent and little thing, would the whole of human life appear, did we enter into a just view and impression of that future state of our existence which the gospel hath revealed.

The apostle Paul hath given a very beautiful and strong description of the manner in which a Christian ought to stand affected to the interests and connexions of this world, considered in this view of them ; * *But this I say, brethren, the time is short ; it remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none, and they that weep, as though they wept not, and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy, as though they possessed not, and they that use this world, as not abusing it ;* the apostle's argument, in the following words, is significant and beautiful, *The fashion of this world passeth away.* The original expression is, the scene of this world passeth away, or is withdrawn : and the

* 1 Cor. vii. 29.

sense of the apostle seems to be, that from the light of the gospel we should learn to view the transactions of this world, as men do the transactions of the stage. No man reckons it a matter of importance what character he personates upon the stage, because in an hour or two the whole transaction ends; the actors are divested of their personated characters, and every one returns to the genuine and durable transactions of his life. Such is the state of our existence in this world, when compared with the state of our existence in that world which is beyond the grave. Death, which is not far from every man, is soon to shut the theatre of life. Then all the different transactions of this world shall be wound up; and every man retiring from the theatre, shall go to the eternal world, where his genuine character and state shall be determined irreversibly.

Thus the unspeakable importance of *the one thing needful* will appear to every man

who views it with a calm impartial eye, in the light in which we have placed it ; and in this light it will undoubtedly appear to every one of us, ere long : approaching to the end of life we shall perceive, that the *many things about which we have been troubled* are lost and gone from us for ever : and that therefore, we must be destitute of every source of joy or hope, if the one thing needful has been neglected and forgot : but that, on the other hand, every thing that we have done in order to secure this better part still remains, and shall remain with us for ever. † *I have seen the wicked great in power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree : yet he passed away, and lo he was not ; yea I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect and behold the upright ; for the end of that man is peace.*

But surely it is needless to search for arguments to show the importance of religion, in this view of it. It is but open-

† Ps. xxvii. 35.

ing our eyes, and fixing our attention for a moment, and it will be impossible for us not to be convinced of its infinite importance.

Instead, therefore, of seeking arguments to convince your understandings, I would only request your attention to the subject. Expostulate the matter with yourselves. Give religion but a fair impartial hearing; (she asks no more) then judge of her importance: and, I pray you, what can come within the reach of human thought that deserves your serious attention if this does not? We can see to the end of all the interests and projects of this world. They are all of them to terminate and die at the end of life, many of them die and the effects of them are gone, ere we get this length. But religion is a pursuit, the consequences of which reach unto eternity. It is the necessary preparation for that important and decisive period of our being when God is to call us to his judgment seat,

seat, and fix us in a state of happiness or misery for ever. *It is the good part that shall never be taken from us.*

If, brethren, we are wise, we will foresee and think upon this great event, ere it come to pass. Of the day or hour in which it is to happen *knoweth no man*, says our blessed Saviour. But it is of equal certainty and of equal consequence to us, as if we just now saw the judge coming in the clouds. The distance of those events which we expect to happen, in the present course of things, may seem to diminish their importance, and thereby to excuse our inattention to their consequences; as many unforeseen events may intervene to prevent them altogether, or to lessen their importance when they shall arrive. But *one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* No accident can happen to disappoint those purposes of God which are fixed by his unalterable wisdom; and least of all to prevent

prevent that future judgment of the world, which is to be the solemn consummation of his works; and to which all the preceding administrations of his providence have their final reference.

Suffer not then the cares and pleasures of this world to banish from your thoughts this momentous concern. Remember the condition of the man whom our Saviour describes *, who said unto himself, he had much goods laid up for many years, and therefore thought he might take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry: to whom, however, God said, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.*

Be especially, I beseech you, on your guard, against the desperate madness of despising this momentous concern; from a vain affectation of superior wisdom, and an arrogant pretence of despising vulgar superstition and credulity. Remember that the wit of man will not alter the real nature

* Luke xii. 16.

and

and course of things, or disappoint the purposes of God. If religion be a real thing, it is the most momentous thing that ever entered into human thought; and the consequences of despising it must be dreadful and tremendous beyond imagination; and could you be prevailed upon, to take it into your serious and calm consideration, and judge of it with the same degree of candour that you employ about all the other interests of life, you would not be able for a moment to resist the evidence of its importance and authority. Those vain apologies by which the sinner justifies himself in excluding it from his attention and regard, or attempts to stifle his conviction of its truth, would fly before him as the phantoms of a dream when one awakes. That God will judge the world in righteousness, and render unto every man according to his works, is not only solemnly revealed from heaven, by the true and faithful witness; but it is a truth inscribed upon the conscience, by the

the hand of God; and there is an inward monitor and witness of it in the breast of every man. Nay, was God the judge of heaven and earth, to be no more than a silent spectator of his works, yet would every sinner be constrained at length to pronounce a solemn condemnation of himself. The calm and gentle whispers of the human conscience may be put to silence for a while, by the noise of the world, and the artifice of sinful passions; but at the end of life it will break loose from every imposition and restraint. It will then speak out with a tremendous voice, and fix with irresistible authority, the character and fate of every man.

The above reflections claim your attention and regard. No wise man will treat them with indifference; far less will he treat them with contempt and scorn. To fear, when there is no cause for fear, is, indeed, the mark of ignorance and weakness. But to fear, when we are in real danger; and
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in such a manner, as either to extricate ourselves, or to take the proper measures of defence, is not below the bravery or caution of the bravest man. Hence, says Solomon; * *A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil; but the fool rageth, and is confident.* Thus do men judge and act in every other business of life; and thus too, will every wise man judge, and act, in the matter now before us.

The uncertainty which is alledged by sceptical and sinful men to accompany the doctrines of a future judgment, and eternal world, is but a weak pretence for excluding them from their attention and regard. Is there not an equal, or superior uncertainty in every other business on earth? Before a man can execute any one important project in this world, a length of time must intervene, and many accidents may happen to prevent its execution and success. But does a wise man, on that ac-

* Prov. xiv. 16.

count, neglect the proper business of life? Does the husbandman neglect the culture of his ground, or to sow the seed in spring, because the success of his labour is distant and invisible, or because the badness of the season, or other accidents, may prevent his reaping the fruits of harvest? Does a father neglect the education of a son for the business of manhood; because, possibly, the son may die before he is a man, or may abuse the means of education that are given him? Why then do men despise religion, because of the supposed uncertainty of its effects? Is there not at least as much evidence and certainty for the truth of those future and unseen events, which religion has presented to our thoughts, as there is for the arrival of those events, on the prospect of which all our business and projects in this world proceed? If there is, it is not want of evidence, but of honesty and candour, that hinders us from seeing and owning its importance. Will any man
(for

(for instance) say, that he has superior, or equal certainty, for living out the time requisite for the accomplishment of his commercial schemes, or that they will succeed according to his hopes, as is given to the righteous man, by the united voice of reason and of revelation, *That it shall be well with him for ever, and that his labour in the Lord shall not be in vain.*

Let us, however, for once, make the supposition, that religion is a doubtful thing; and that it is a matter only of conjecture and uncertainty, what shall be the fate of the righteous and the wicked, beyond the grave: this is all that can be asked; for no man (it is believed) is so extravagant as to affirm, that he is sure there is nothing in religion, or that the religious man proceeds upon a certain error and mistake. Now from this concession itself, what conclusion will a wise man draw? no other than what the religious man draws from a full conviction of its evidence
and

and certainty, viz. That it is the *one thing needful*. If he has gone upon a mistake, his condition, however, can be no worse than the condition of the man by whom religion is despised. But if his principles are true, he is to be for ever happy; whilst the other is unhappy, and undone for ever.

Upon the same concession, what is to be deemed the difference of their situation, in this present life? The religious man may think himself obliged to renounce the immoral and dishonest pleasures of the world, which (God knows) add little to the happiness of life; in place of them, he purchases the peaceful consciousness of innocence, a joyful confidence in God, and the transporting prospect of a blessed immortality; and, supposing all this to be a dream, it is, however, the most delightful one that ever entered into the heart of man. But the man by whom religion is neglected or despised, can, by all his efforts, purchase nothing more than some intemperate

rate and brutal pleasures, or some dishonourable gains; with no satisfaction or enjoyment from himself, no confidence in God, no hope of happiness beyond the grave.

The whole of the argument, therefore, terminates in this: The religious man believes, and rejoices in the belief, that there is a God who made, and rules the world in which he lives; that righteousness is the rule, and law of his administration; that he is the present friend and protector of righteous men, and will reward them with immortal happiness beyond the grave. The irreligious man believes, or wishes to believe, that there is no God, no providence, or moral government in nature; that piety and virtue are the dreams of credulous and simple men; that all the wise and worthy persons that ever have appeared, or shall appear in any age or nation under heaven, shall, at the end of life, sink with the rest of mankind into nothing. These
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are the only principles from which he can derive tranquillity and comfort. His course of life unavoidably disposes him to hate and depreciate the opposite principles of piety and virtue. These principles do, indeed, impart a joy, *unspeakable and full of glory*, to the man who is upright in heart. To the sinner, they are the objects of hatred or dread; and his only consolation and resource is, that he hopes they may be false.

This being the plain and obvious footing on which the righteous and the sinner stand, can we hesitate a moment in determining which of them has chosen the better part? Let every man present, who hath ears to hear, or an heart to understand, hearken, judge, and determine for himself.

Were we to suppose, that some heavenly messenger, or one of our departed friends, was just now to appear in our assembly, and to call upon us in the name of God,

to give our attention to *the one thing needful*, and *the good part that shall not be taken from us*; was he to call on each of us by name, and warn us of the danger of neglecting it; would we rise from the assembly, just as thoughtless and indifferent about the matter as we were before? or would not such a singular admonition awaken our most serious attention and regard? Ah! brethren, is it not of equal certainty, and of equal consequence, as if its truth and importance were declared in this unusual and awful manner?

In ancient times, Solomon, endowed with special wisdom and authority, was raised by Providence to preach this solemn lesson to the world; * *Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man; for God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* But if we will not hearken to the wisest of the sons of

* Eccl. xii. 13.

men, *behold a wiser and greater than he is here.* The Son of God came down from heaven, to teach, and inculcate this important doctrine. † *When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. Then shall the King say to them on his right hand; Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world. — Then shall he say also to them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. — And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.*

Upon the whole, brethren, suffer me to call upon you, in the name of God, and

† Mat. xxv. 31.

in the exercise of that friendship which is due to your immortal souls ; to hearken to this important lesson from the Son of God ; *While you are careful, and troubled about many things, one thing is needful.*

When the holy apostle Paul preached the doctrine of a future judgment to the Christians at Corinth, he immediately added ; * *Knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men.* Knowing the terrible calamities that were to fall upon the heads of wicked men at the future judgment of the world, his compassionate and feeling heart would not suffer him to be silent on the subject ; but excited him to exert his utmost influence to apprise his brethren of their danger. When the merciful Redeemer looked upon the city of Jerusalem, and foresaw its approaching desolation, he melted into tears, and cried, † *O Jerusalem, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least,*

* 1 Cor. v. 10.

† Luke xix. 41.

in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! And can a man, who has the feelings of humanity, look on the assembly, from the place where I now stand, and think, there are some in the assembly, (God knows how many) who are fast approaching to the future judgment, and eternal world, totally regardless of these *terrors of the Lord*, and not exert the utmost efforts in his power to warn them of their danger; or not feel somewhat of that tenderness, and pity, which moved the Son of God, when *he beheld Jerusalem and wept.*

Blessed God! can a more affecting prospect be presented to the eye of man, than a multitude of reasonable souls, made to be for ever happy in the mansions of eternal life, hurrying through this transitory world to the mansions of eternal woe?

But God only has the hearts of men entirely in his hand. In mercy, may he cause your understandings to perceive, and your hearts to feel the importance of this solemn admonition from the Son of God, *One thing is needful!*

DISCOURSE XV.

On Public Worship.

PSALM cvii. 31, 32.

O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men: let them exalt Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders.

THIS Psalm begins with a solemn exhortation to the praise of God: *O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever.* To enforce this exhortation, the Psalmist, in the sequel of the Psalm, describes the goodness of the Lord, and his mercy to the sons of men, in

in a variety of beautiful and affecting instances. He begins and ends his descriptions with this affectionate address; *O, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness.*—To this address he adds, in the words now read; *Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.* In which words he calls on men to praise the Lord, not only by themselves, or in retirement from the world, but in society with one another, or in the public assemblies of the saints.

By the *congregation of the people, and the assembly of the elders*, we are to understand, those religious assemblies of the Israelites, which met together with a view to worship God, in the place appointed for that sacred exercise, under the direction of those, who, by their office, were appointed to preside in these assemblies. From the text it is proposed, to consider the obligations men are under to worship God, in a social and public manner, and to represent the importance

importance of this duty. But before we enter on this subject, it may be proper to premise an observation or two, on the nature, and importance, of religious worship, or praise, in general.

To praise God, or to exalt him, denotes our exercising those affections towards him which the perfections of his nature, the relations in which he stands to us, and the obligations we are under to his goodness, ought, in reason, to awaken in our hearts; our expressing them by proper outward signs of homage and respect; and our doing this, under a particular and immediate attention to his presence. Piety, in general, denotes the habitual attention of the soul to God; and that habitual regard for the divine character and providence which ought to be expressed in every part of life. The worship or praise of him, denotes the explicit exercise of this habitual regard, excited by an immediate attention to his presence, and expressed by those external acts

acts of homage and acknowledgment which either the nature of the exercise itself suggests, or the sacred scriptures have prescribed. The duty, therefore, consists of two parts. First, of that which is internal, denoting those devout affections which ought to be awakened in the heart. Secondly, of that which is external, denoting those expressions of regard which these affections natively suggest ; or which are prescribed by the express command of God.

The obligations we are under to the first of these may be obvious to every one. The heart of man was evidently formed, in order to be moved by the view of what is excellent and worthy in a moral character. Admiration and esteem, gratitude, complacency, and confidence, are the natural emotions of the human heart, when their proper objects are presented to our view. Upon reflection, we approve our being thus affected and disposed ; and the want of these affections we condemn, as the symptom

symptom of extreme corruption or stupidity. Now these affections, when they are directed towards God, and excited by attention to his character and providence, constitute the internal part of religious worship, or what our Saviour hath called the worship of God, *in spirit and in truth*; and it is impossible to assign a reason why these moral feelings in the heart of man, should, on all other just occasions, be excited and approved; and why they should not be equally excited and approved by a suitable attention to the nature and providence of God, or why the absence of them should not be equally condemned.

The obligations we are under to observe, what I have called the external part of divine worship, may likewise be obvious to every one. Every affection in the heart of man is improved by exercise: and the only way to give the virtuous affections of the heart a proper influence and ascendant in our character, is to exercise them

them often in explicit acts ; and therefore, every man who has the general habit of devotion towards God will be unavoidably disposed, in order to preserve and strengthen his devotion, to praise and worship him in the external duties of religion, on every proper opportunity. Even abstracting from this consequence, every pious man must necessarily feel an immediate propensity to this religious exercise ; since every habit of which we are possessed inclines us, in a powerful manner, to those exertions of itself by which it was at first acquired. On this account we may affirm with safety, that there never was a man of real piety who did not find himself disposed to worship God in the external institutions of his service, and who did not feel an immediate satisfaction and pleasure in this exercise.

Having premised these remarks on the nature and foundations of the worship of God ; let us, in the next place, consider
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the obligations we are under to worship him in society with one another, or *in the congregation of the people.*

To this duty men seem to be directed by the general sense of nature. In all nations of the world, which have not been entirely sunk in darkness and stupidity, the public worship of the Deity (though under many different forms) hath been observed. To this purpose certain places have been set apart as sacred; temples and altars have been built; religious rites and officers have been prescribed. Amongst the Jewish people over whom God presided, in a special manner, as their king, a very particular attention was given to this matter by the laws and institutions of his government. As soon as he called them from idolatry to the worship of himself, he commanded them to worship him in the most public and solemn manner possible, and with a very special detail described the forms which were to be observed in the

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performance of this duty. With this view the priests and levites were appointed to their sacred offices ; the tabernacle, and afterwards the temple, with their several ornaments and rites, were erected by divine authority. To secure the regular performance of this duty, the observation of the sabbath was prescribed as a day appropriated to the worship and service of the Deity, in the congregation of the people.

Agreeably to these divine prescriptions, all those eminent and pious men whose character is marked with honour in the sacred records, are distinguished by their zeal for the public worship of the Deity, and the exemplary regard which they expressed for this religious exercise. Solomon, the greatest and the wisest of the kings of Israel, had it reserved to him, as the glory of his reign, to build the temple of the living God ; an honour which had been refused to his father David. Our blessed Saviour himself, who was a greater
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than Solomon, gave a regular attendance on the public worship of his father. He went every sabbath-day, we are informed §, into the synagogue; and this part of his conduct was so well known, that being absent, on some occasion, from one of the religious festivals of the Jews †, it was observed by the people with surprise. In consequence of these examples, the apostles, soon after the ascension of their master, met together with the rest of the disciples, and were employed in breaking of bread and in prayers, (that is) in the worship of God, according to the model of the Christian institution. In order to perpetuate this religious practice in the Christian church, peculiar gifts were given and religious officers ordained to direct the worship of Christian assemblies; and to edify the church of Christ, * *He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evan-*

§ Luke iv. 16.

† John xi. 56.

* Eph. iv. 11.

gelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Hence, since the days of the apostles, public worship has been constantly observed in the Christian church, as a duty of divine appointment and authority.

To all this it may be added, that God has promised his peculiar blessing on the religious assemblies of his people. When Solomon had finished the dedication of the temple, the Lord appeared to him, and said, † *Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attend unto the prayer that is made in this place; for now I have chosen and sanctified this place, that my name may be there for ever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there for ever.* When our blessed Saviour, immediately before he left the world, instituted the Christian church, and gave commission to his apostles to propagate the gospel through the world, he added this impor-

† 2 Chron. vii. 15.

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tant promise, § *Lo I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.* Thus now the case of public worship stands, and our obligation to observe it is deduced from sacred scripture. From thence it sufficiently appears that this duty is commanded by divine authority, and is of great importance in the sight of God.

This duty, however, does not rest solely on the footing of a positive command. The laws of God recorded in the scriptures, are, in their own nature, * *holy, just, and good*; and such as the reason and consciences of men must, on the footing of their own excellence, approve. It is an agreeable and useful exercise, and it tends greatly to excite our gratitude to God and our veneration for the laws which he has given us, to view them in this light; and, on due attention, we shall find that the law of God, which has enjoined the practice of public worship, is, in this view of

§ Mat. xxviii. 19.

* Rom. vii. 12.

it, entitled to our special regard. It is proposed, therefore, in the following part of this discourse, to consider the original importance of this duty, the obligations we are under to observe it, arising from the nature of the thing itself, from the constitution of our own nature, and the circumstances wherein Providence has placed us. To this purpose let us observe ;

1st, That men ought to worship God in society together, because of the joint connexion which they have with the great object of their worship. As every single man has a separate dependance upon God, and is under separate and personal obligations to his goodness ; so the whole human race in general, and every particular society with which we are connected, are equally dependant upon God, and are under peculiar obligations to his goodness.

The general obligations we are under to worship God arise from the perfections of his nature ; the displays which he has
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given us of them in his works ; and from our own dependance on the power and goodness of his providence. But in these perfections of his nature, the whole human race have an equal interest and concern : the displays which he has given of them are made in common to us all, and we are all equally dependant on his power and goodness. The beautiful and beneficial frame of nature displays, equally to every man, *the glory of the Lord, and the workmanship of his hand.* The sun shining from the heavens enlightens and enlivens us all at once, and the earth yields the riches of his bounty in common to us all. The blessed scheme of our redemption by the son of God, was contrived and is intended for the benefit of every one to whom it is revealed. When the Lord Jesus Christ delivered the instructions of the gospel, when he died and rose again, he became *the author of salvation to all who should obey him.* In short, the principal

grounds on which we are called to worship God are such as no single man can appropriate to himself. He is called to worship God, principally on account of those discoveries of himself, and of those expressions of his goodness to which he is admitted as a member of the general community of human creatures. As the apostle Paul expresses it, *we have one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one God and father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.* On this account, were it possible the whole human race should worship him together, in one great assembly, as we may believe is done by *the ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands* who worship him in heaven. This, the present imperfection of our nature not admitting, it ought however to be done in as public a manner as is possible.

2dly, To show the obligation we are under to this duty, let us consider the social

social disposition of the human heart, and the peculiar advantages and pleasure which must accompany the public worship of our Maker from this circumstance in the constitution of our nature. That man is a social creature (that is) fitted by the author of his being, to live and pursue the ends of his existence in society, is universally acknowledged. A principal circumstance to be observed in this part of our constitution, is, that all the natural feelings and affections of the heart are accompanied with certain outward signs whereby they appear to the view and observation of those who are around us, that when they are thus expressed, they immediately propagate their influence, and by sympathy excite the like affections in the breasts of our companions; and that when they are excited in this social and sympathetic manner, they are accompanied with a peculiar energy and warmth. Thus joy or grief, fear, gratitude, or love, when they are excited

upon just occasions, and are expressed in a natural and unaffected manner, immediately insinuate themselves into the minds of those by whom they are observed, and are increased by this communication. Now, what is thus observable in all the other natural affections of the human heart will be found to hold equally, in the exercise of those devout affections by which we are called to worship God. They are fitted to insinuate and spread their influence by sympathy as much as any other affections of which we are susceptible. If this influence is seldomer observed, the reason is, that these devout affections are seldomer excited to that degree of strength which is requisite, in order to communicate their influence, in the same natural and unaffected manner that other feelings and affections of our nature do.

If when we are called to worship God in the *congregation of the people*, we felt the full power of those affections towards him
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which the perfections of his nature and the works which he has done, ought, in justice, to awaken in our hearts ; they would, in spite of us, appear in the face of our religious assemblies ; and every serious worshiper of God would thereby feel himself enlivened and enlarged, much beyond what he finds himself capable of, in a different situation. This is probably the reason why the holy psalmist so frequently and so fervently expresses, in his book of psalms, his desire of being in the house of God, and of joining there in the service of his Maker with the *congregation of the people and the assembly of the elders*.

From all that hath been said on this head we may with certainty conclude, that God intended men should be united together in society, in order to worship and adore the Creator and preserver of their being, as well as to promote all the other important purposes of human life. Every other faculty of man is carried to its proper vigour and

and perfection by a social intercourse with his fellow-men: this will be found equally the case in that peculiar faculty, by which he is qualified to be the worshiper of God. It is therefore the voice of Nature, and the voice of God, the Author of our nature, that men should *exalt Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders.*

The preceding argument, founded on the social constitution of our nature, receives an additional and a peculiar force from the faculty of speech; by which we are distinguished from the brutal species, as well as by the faculty of reason and intelligence. Can it be imagined, that this distinguishing ability was given to men, in order to promote all the other improvements of human life, with a view to which they unite together in society; but was not given in order to promote those improvements, of which their natures are susceptible, as they are the worshipers of God,
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and the subjects of his rational and moral kingdom? If this faculty of speech is deemed a mark of our pre-eminence above the beasts, does not the employment of it in the praise of God, put this pre-eminence in the strongest light? It has been often and justly observed, that the dignity of the human nature, above the nature of the beasts, principally appears in this; that man alone is capable of the knowledge and worship of the Deity; that he alone is able to observe those discoveries of his being and perfections, which are given by his works. We may extend the thought, and make this farther observation; That the dignity of human society, whereby it is distinguished from the brutal herds, principally appears in this; that while these inferior animals, prompted by the animal instincts of their nature, flock together, only for their mutual defence, and the continuance of their brutal life, men are formed into society, in order to a joint
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adoration of their great creator; in order to enlarge each other's knowledge of his works; and by sympathy and fellow-feeling, to raise, and to animate the devotion of their hearts.

Without insisting farther on this argument, we may refer the matter to the natural sense of every man. Does the dignity of the human species, in any case, appear in a stronger light, than when a numerous assembly meet, in amity and friendship, to adore the creator of the world, and the common friend and parent of mankind; and, being thus employed, are animated, *like the men of God unto all good works*. Recollect the example of king Solomon *. Does that wise and powerful monarch appear with so much dignity at any period of his life, or in any instance of his grandeur, as when, at the dedication of the temple, he appeared upon the head of a numerous assembly of his people;

* 2 Chron. vi.

and, on his bended knees, and with his eyes lifted up to heaven, addressed the Creator of the world, in the solemn manner, which the sacred historian relates, on occasion of that glorious solemnity? or did the tribes of Israel appear, at any period of their history, in a more respectable form, than when, after the example of their king, they prostrated themselves before the Majesty of God, and joined together in the solemn homage, which was then addressed to the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

3dly, Let it be observed, that the duty recommended in the text, is an excellent mean of preserving in the minds of men a sense of their dependance upon God, and of the obligations they are under to his service. The arguments hitherto suggested, represent the obligations to this duty, which arise from its own native excellence; its connection with the frame and constitution of our nature, and from the
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circumstances in which Providence has placed us in this world. The argument, which I now offer, is drawn from its effects.

How much the bulk of men, from their natural inattention, or stupidity, from the business and dissipation of the world, need to be awakened to a sense of God, and called upon to give attention to the obligations they are under to his providence, may be obvious to every one. Were it left to the choice of every man, to put himself in mind of his dependance upon God, and of the obligations he is under to his goodness, without being called upon, by any external public form of religious worship, we have reason to apprehend, that the greater part of mankind would sink into a total forgetfulness of God, and of every religious obligation; and it is probable, that what sense of religion remains in the minds of men, if it does not owe its origin, yet, in a great measure,

measure, owes its preservation, and continuance, to this ordinance of God.

Public worship, therefore, is at least a solemn admonition to mankind of their dependance upon God; and that they are accountable to him as the subjects of his kingdom. This seems to have been the principal thing intended, by that variety of religious rites established in the Jewish church; viz. That by their frequency, and solemnity, the Jews might have habitually in their eye, the creation and government of this world, by the one true God, and their own peculiar dependance on his providence; whilst other nations were involved in the darkness of idolatry. This useful tendency of public worship is so obvious, that they who are disposed to lessen its importance, have, however, represented it as an engine of state, contrived to overawe the consciences of men, and preserve the order of society. This representation of the matter does, at least, imply an acknowledgment—

knowledgment, that the public worship of the Deity is a beneficial institution, and ought to be established and observed for the peace and order of society. Agreeably to this, it is to be observed, that nations, in the earlier periods of their government, ere their morals were corrupted by opulence and luxury, have usually expressed a veneration for the public institutions of religion; and that, in later periods, after the purity and virtue of their manners had declined, their regard for these religious institutions equally declined. Whether it be that a neglect of religion is the cause, or the consequence of national depravity, they have usually gone together in the progress of society.

4thly, The public worship of the Deity is a no less powerful mean of strengthening the social and kind affections of the human heart, and of uniting men together in the exercise of charity and friendship. When men meet together, in order

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to acknowledge and adore the Creator of the world, to address their united supplications for his favour, and their united praises for his mercies; their trust in him, as their common friend and parent, and their hope of living together in eternal friendship; in the kingdom of their Father; in this situation they appear to each other, in such an endearing light, as tends, in the strongest manner, to excite and cherish every tender and humane affection in their hearts. In such assemblies, every jarring and uncharitable passion is composed, mutual competitions disappear, and the invidious distinctions of this world are forgot. We stand together on a perfect level in the presence of our Maker, having all of us the same desires and hopes, the same obligations, and the same sense of indigence, or guilt, to acknowledge in his presence. The consideration of one another in these mild and pacific views, tends greatly to sweeten the affections of the heart of man,

and * to provoke one another to love and to good works.

gthly, I shall only just add, in the last place, that the public worship of God is one of the most effectual preparations for the exercises and enjoyments of the heavenly world. The work of heaven is described in scripture, (and it is the sublimest conception we can form of it) as consisting in the united praise and adoration of the holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. I beheld, says John, in the book of the Revelation, † and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne—and the number of them was ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. And every creature which is in heaven—heard I, saying, blessing, and honour, and glory, be to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the lamb, for ever and ever. From this united adoration, will result that fullness of joy, which is before the face of God; and to what higher source can

* Heb. x. 24.

† Rev. v. 11.

we ascribe this heavenly joy. Here the sweetest and best affections of the soul; the love and praise of infinite perfection, and all the soft endearments of mutual benevolence and friendship mingling together, will fill the spirits of the just, with a *joy unspeakable and full of glory*. To learn this sacred employment upon earth is, therefore, the immediate and most effectual preparation for the future happiness and glory of the heavenly state.

Having thus endeavoured to describe the obligations men are under to observe the public worship of the Deity, I conclude with a few practical reflections on the subject.

1st, Let us be exhorted to consider the importance of this duty, and to shew by our conduct that regard which is due to its importance. It is now observed almost by every man, and has been for some time past the complaint of serious and thoughtful persons, that a disregard for the public

offices of religion, is a growing evil in the age and place of the world wherein we live. Whatever be the cause of it, whether it be that national prosperity, and its usual consequences, dissipation and luxury, have led us to dismiss that serious sense of God, which prevailed in the days of our forefathers; or, that, avoiding the extreme of superstition and formality, which it may be thought was the distinction of the former age, we have, by a false refinement, and according to the usual weakness of humanity, run into the opposite extreme: whatever be the cause, the fact itself is undeniable; that as different ages have been distinguished by different sorts of errors and extremes, the deplorable distinction of the present age is a growing disregard for the public worship of the Deity, *in the congregation of his people.*

It is therefore the duty of every good man, by his example and authority, and by every proper influence that Providence
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has given him, to check the progress of this evil. If the public worship of God be of such authority, usefulness, and moment, as has been described, no man can live in the neglect of it, or seem to approve of that neglect of it, which so much prevails in the present age, without the guilt of a very criminal and hurtful immorality.

Let no man think, that because his own particular improvement is not much concerned in the public institutions of religion, he may therefore be excused for withdrawing from them his attendance and regard. Were the truth, which is alledged in this apology, to be sustained, (which, however, it is believed, will not be insisted on by any one who is piously disposed) it would still remain to be the duty of every man to promote, by his example, a regard for these sacred institutions; because of their importance to the virtue and happiness of the far greater part of mankind; and because of the fatal consequences, that would

inevitably flow from a total discontinuance and contempt of them: nor let any one imagine, that because he already knows his duty, or may learn it, possibly, to better purpose by himself, he may therefore be excused from attending the public offices of piety. The principal design of these sacred institutions, is not so much to increase our religious knowledge, as to quicken and increase the devotion of our hearts; and in this view the observation of them is equally incumbent upon every man.

2d, Let it be our care, when we *praise the Lord in the congregation of the people*, that we do it with that inward piety, and homage of the heart, which God requires, as of chief importance in this sacred exercise. * *God is a spirit*, says our Saviour, *and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth*. To worship him in this manner, is to do it with those spiritual and devout affections in the heart, which are

* John iv. 24.

correspondent to the nature of those outward acts of homage in which we are employed; so as that the last of these may be the native image and expression of the first. And if we thus worship God, *in spirit and in truth*, our worship will produce a gravity and reverence in the whole of our deportment in the house of God. Every degree of ostentation, or hypocrisy, is odious and detestable. Nevertheless, were our thoughts employed, and our hearts affected, in the manner they ought to be in the public offices of piety, this would immediately appear in the outward form of our religious assemblies. The *form of godliness* may be, indeed, where *the power* of it is not; but scarcely can the power of it obtain, where the form is not. The marks of inattention, indifference, or levity, which are sometimes to be seen in the house of God, cannot therefore be thought consistent with those exercises of the heart in which we

profess to be engaged; and they are *spots* in our religious assemblies.

3d, Let it be our care, that our regard for the public offices of religion be accompanied with a suitable behaviour in every other circumstance of life. No acts of religious worship, whether they be of a public, or private nature, can be acceptable to God, unless they are joined with integrity of life, and those fruits of *righteousness*, which are by *Jesus Christ* to the glory and praise of God. Nay, the scriptures teach us to consider all outward acts of piety, as designed to be the means of our improvement in moral rectitude, and holiness of life; and that without this connection, they are hateful in the sight of God. * *The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination.* † *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*

* Prov. xxi. 27.

† Prov. xxviii. 9.

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This observation merits the particular attention of those who esteem the public worship of their Maker; as it is the surest method of preserving its credit and esteem. Let such pious persons convince the world, by the distinguished purity and virtue of their lives, that public worship is a rational and useful institution: and let it be remembered, that if those who attend upon it are not, by its influence, improved in their moral conduct, and do not appear in any other circumstance of life, to be usefuller and better men; much more if the world can observe the like symptoms of depravity in those who worship God, as in those who do it not; if they can observe the same marks of avarice and sordid attachment to the interests of this world, the same dissimulation, and falsehood, the same ungovernable pride, anger, or revenge, this must have a very powerful tendency to confirm the irreligious part of mankind in their contempt

contempt of the public institutions of religion.

4th, From what hath been delivered, it is easy to perceive the wisdom and importance of appropriating some particular time for the public worship of the Deity. As soon as God had appointed the observation of this duty amongst the Jews, he prescribed the observation of the Sabbath; and it must be evident to every one, who gives attention to the matter, that it behoved each of these to rest upon the same authority. Had it been left to the choice of every one, at what time, or on what occasion, he should publicly pay his homage to the Deity, we have reason to believe, that from men's habitual inattention to matters of a religious nature, and their incessant avocations of business or pleasure, this sacred exercise must have soon fallen into disuse. It ought also to be remembered, that as the observation of this duty requires
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that communities should meet in the same religious assemblies ; therefore had the time for doing it been left to the choice of every separate community, this must have produced much confusion in society, and occasioned many hurtful interruptions in the useful business of life.

The appointment therefore of a particular day, to be employed in public worship, required the interposition of divine authority ; and if we acknowledge the importance of this duty itself, we must likewise acknowledge that fixing the time on which it was to be observed is of similar importance.

It has been confessed by those who consider things only in the light of their political importance, that the sabbath is a wise and humane contrivance, as it gives to the working part of mankind some respite from those laborious and servile offices which might otherwise be too severe, and totally exhaust their strength. But such persons

persons ought likewise to consider what would be the consequence of the sabbath's being regarded merely as an interval of labour, but not as a day consecrated to the worship of the Deity. Have we not the greatest reason to believe that, in that case, it would be turned into a day of riot and disorder. The active spirits of men must be employed. If they are not employed in useful industry or in the duties of devotion, they will probably be employed in what is sinful and pernicious. Suppose then that all the working part of mankind were every seventh day to be discharged from their usual industry ; and being thus discharged, should be at liberty to employ that portion of their time in such associations with each other, as their inclination or fancy might suggest ; and, it is easy to perceive, that instead of being a prudent or humane contrivance, the sabbath would become a very impolitical and hurtful one : therefore, on the principle of public

public spirit and humanity, should every good man endeavour to promote the religious observation of this ordinance of God?

Having offered these reflections on the importance of public worship, I would beg leave to finish the discourse with an observation suited to the particular * occasion and place of our present meeting.

As the place in which we are now assembled, and to which we have been called to *praise the Lord*, is henceforth to be appropriated to this sacred service, and to have the honourable appellation of *The house of God*; we ought therefore, henceforth to reverence this place, on *his* account whose name it is to bear, and for whose praise and service it is to be reserved.

Our blessed Saviour has indeed informed us †, that neither at Jerusalem nor any

* This discourse was preached at the opening of St. Andrew's church in Glasgow, in Nov. 1753.

† John iv. 23.

one particular place, exclusive of another, are men called to worship God, since his coming into the world ; but that the true worshippers of God are to worship him *in spirit and in truth*, in every place, and in every nation upon earth. Nevertheless as God still requires the public praise and service of his people ; as he has promised his peculiar blessing on their religious assemblies ; there is some kind of reverence and veneration due to the place which is appropriated to this sacred use ; such, at least, as may awaken that regard and attention to the name and presence of God who is there to be adored. On occasion, therefore, of our present meeting, we may, without the charge of superstition, reckon it our duty to lift up our united prayers, that the blessing of the God of Zion may henceforth rest upon this house. That the congregation of his people may never, henceforth, assemble in this house without feeling that devout regard and reverence which

which is due to the name of God. That the prayers and praises of his people, in this house, may be graciously accepted by him. That the religious instructions which shall be delivered in this house, may be felt to be *the wisdom and the power of God*: and that the people of the Lord may never come into nor retire from the sacred service of this house without becoming holier and better men, more thoroughly *furnished unto all good works*. That, in fine, when the present generation of his people shall have left the stage, *a people yet unborn may serve him here*. Amen.

This is the first time in the history of the world
 that a man has been elected President of the United States
 who was not a member of the dominant race. It is a
 historic event, and it is a source of pride to the
 people of the South. It is a sign of progress and
 of the growth of our nation. It is a sign that we
 are becoming a more united people, and that we are
 moving towards a more perfect union. It is a sign
 that we are becoming a more democratic nation, and
 that we are becoming a more just nation. It is a
 sign that we are becoming a more powerful nation, and
 that we are becoming a more respected nation. It is a
 sign that we are becoming a more united people, and
 that we are moving towards a more perfect union.

DISCOURSE XVI.

The Disposition and Conduct of our blessed Saviour at the Grave of Lazarus.

JOHN xi. 33—36.

*When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews
also weeping which came with her, he
groaned in spirit and was troubled; and
said, Where have ye laid him? They say
unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus
wept. Then said some of the Jews; be-
hold how he loved him! And some of
them said, Could not this man who opened
the eyes of the blind, have caused that even*

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this man should not have died? Jesus, therefore, again groaning in himself, cometh to the grave.

THE verses now read contain part of the narrative which the evangelist hath given of our Saviour's raising up Lazarus from the grave, and of the interview which he had with the friends of Lazarus, previous to that event. The disposition and state of mind which our Saviour discovered in this passage of his life, merits our particular attention. This, with the practical reflections which the subject may suggest, I have proposed to direct your attention to, in the following discourse.

The sacred historian hath three different times observed, that our blessed Lord was in distress, and expressed it by his tears and groans when he met with the friends of Lazarus, and during the course of his conversation with them. In the 33d verse,

When

When Jesus saw her (i. e. Mary, the sister of Lazarus) weeping, and the Jews also weeping, he groaned in spirit and was troubled. Again, in the 35th verse, when the Jews desired him to come and see where Lazarus was laid, Jesus wept. Lastly, when the Jews put the question, verse 38th, Could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? The evangelist observes that Jesus again groaned in himself. What (may we believe) were the causes of this distress which the evangelist has thought it proper so particularly to describe. From the circumstances of the case, as they are narrated by him in the context, it appears to have proceeded from the following springs.

1st, From that social tenderness and sympathy which the merciful Author of our Nature hath implanted in the human breast, and which is one of the most amiable impressions of his hand upon the

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heart of man. Observe what is said by the evangelist, in the 33d verse, *when Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in spirit and was troubled.* This part of the narrative naturally leads us to conclude, that when Jesus *groaned in spirit and was troubled*, his distress proceeded from his sympathy and fellow-feeling with the mourning friends. *He wept with them that wept*, entering with a sympathetic tenderness into their sorrow and distress.

When Jesus Christ assumed the nature of a man, or as the evangelist hath expressed it, *was made flesh, and dwelt among us*, he undoubtedly received into his bosom every innocent emotion of the human heart: nay, we must believe that the best affections of humanity, were the principal and the most conspicuous parts of the nature and character which he assumed. And it will not be refused, that a fellow-feeling or sympathetic sorrow with each other in distress,

distress, is one of the best affections of humanity, and one of the most amiable remains of the divine image in the heart of man.

To this account of the cause of our Saviour's distress, it may be added, that being thus affected by the weeping and distress of the sisters and friends of Lazarus, he was not unwilling to express it in the manner here described; with a view to give them consolation and relief. That same benevolent Creator who hath prompted us *to weep with them that weep*, hath so framed the heart of man, that in his affliction he receives a mighty consolation from the sympathy and fellow-feeling of his friends: more especially, in those afflictions which proceed from the tender and humane attachments of the heart, the sweetest ease and consolation we can give, is to mingle our tears with the tears of our afflicted friends. Our Saviour knowing this (*for he knew what was in man*)

knowing also that his own sympathy, in particular, would have a most consoling influence upon the mourning friends, was therefore willing to give vent to it, in the manner here described; prompted to this by the same benevolence and pity with which his own heart was touched, in this affecting interview.

2d, This social tenderness and sympathy which the Author of our Nature hath taught us to feel for others in distress, was heightened in the mind of the blessed Jesus by that peculiar friendship and affection which he had for Lazarus and his afflicted friends. Added to the general impressions of humanity, a peculiar sympathy takes place between those who are united by the ties of a virtuous friendship and regard. In this intimate and agreeable connexion, sympathy is founded on esteem, and is powerfully cemented by a similitude of virtuous manners and designs. Hence it is that a virtuous friend,
in

in circumstances of distress, is of all other objects upon earth, the most affecting to an affectionate and feeling heart. That our Saviour's distress, in this passage of his life, proceeded from this cause, is extremely probable. Lazarus and his two sisters were, we have good reason to believe, a virtuous family, with whom the blessed Jesus had contracted an intimate connexion, and with whom he had lived in all the soft endearments of mutual friendship and esteem, on account of the probity and virtue of their manners; and that this peculiar virtuous attachment occasioned the emotion and distress which he discovered in this passage of his life, may, with sufficient evidence, be inferred from the following circumstances related by the evangelist.

In the 11th verse the denomination of a friend is expressly given to Lazarus by our Saviour himself. *He saith to them, our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may*
G 4 *awake*

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awake him out of sleep. In the 3d verse, when the sisters of Lazarus sent to Jesus to inform him of their brother's sickness, their message was delivered in the following words; *Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick.* In the 5th verse it is expressly said, *that Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.* Jesus was the lover of all mankind. By this expression, therefore, the evangelist undoubtedly designed to signify that he loved Lazarus and his sisters with that strong and warm affection which proceeds from the peculiar ties of friendship and esteem. It was in this sense that John was denominated *the disciple whom Jesus loved.* That is, whom he honoured with a peculiar share of his affection, and with whom he lived in all the intimacy and endearments of the most affectionate and tender friendship. The justice of this interpretation of our Saviour's distress, is farther evident from the observation of the Jews when they saw

our

our Saviour weeping at the grave of Lazarus, in the 36th verse, then said the Jews, *behold how he loved him.*

From all these circumstances it may sufficiently appear, that our Saviour's tears and groans in this affecting passage of his life, proceeded from the tender friendship and regard which he had for Lazarus his departed friend, and for his two sisters who were now in tears for the loss of their beloved brother. The blessed Jesus thus distressed and weeping at the grave of Lazarus, and mingling his tears with the tears of his afflicted friends, discovered the most amiable tenderness and sensibility of which the human heart is capable, viz. that which flows from the dictates of humanity, softened and increased by the peculiar endearments of virtuous friendship and esteem.

3d, Another cause of our Saviour's groaning at the grave of Lazarus, was not improbably the generous distress of mind which

which he felt on his observing the ignorance and weakness of his friends, and how little able or disposed they were to derive consolation under their affliction, from those blessed views of immortality which he had given them in the gospel. This interpretation, I found on his behaviour and discourse, when he first met with Martha, and heard her lamentation for the loss of her beloved brother. In the 23d verse, Jesus said unto her, *thy brother shall rise again.* In the 25th verse, *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever believeth in me shall never die.*

Our blessed Saviour, we may well believe, had been, during the course of his ministry, solicitous to give his friends all the consolation which religion could afford under the calamities of life, particularly under that calamity which always strikes the deepest wound into an affectionate and tender heart, viz. the loss of a beloved and

virtuous

virtuous friend. Now the chief consolation which his religion gives, under this distress, is the assurance of a future blessed immortality ; where our virtuous friends, and the friends of Jesus Christ, are gone before us, and where we are afterwards to meet together with eternal joy. Observing therefore, that the sisters and friends of Lazarus, and his own beloved friends, had not imbibed this blessed consolation, he wept at the sight of their ignorance and weakness, and therefore, in their hearing, repeated the heavenly and consoling truth, *I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Whosoever believeth in me shall never die.*

This was a cause of our Saviour's distress, peculiar to himself, and peculiarly graceful and becoming *him* in the office which he bore as the instructor and redeemer of mankind : and it sets his character before us in the most endearing light

light we can conceive. He did not only, like a good man, weep for the calamities of men, from the general dictates of humanity; but, like the merciful Redeemer of the human race, he wept with a peculiar strain of tenderness and pity, when he beheld his friends so insensible to the impressions of the gospel, and so unwilling to receive that heavenly consolation under their distress which he had set before them, from the prospect of a blessed resurrection to eternal life. His tears, in this view of them, were the tears of piety, humanity, and friendship, mingled with each other in the most amiable form; and sufficient, one would think, to touch the heart of every man, and endear this benevolent and loving Saviour of the world to our warmest affection and regard.

4th, Our Saviour's distress at the grave of Lazarus might probably proceed from his observing the unbelief and diffidence of his power, which was discovered by the

Jews

Jews who were present at this interview. This remark is founded on what is said in the 37th and 38th verses.

In the 37th verse we are informed that some of the Jews who had come to Mary and Martha, to comfort them concerning their brother, said, *Could not this man which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?* Upon which it is immediately added by the evangelist, verse 38, *Jesus therefore again groaning in himself, cometh to the grave.*

The question of the Jews proceeded from their unbelief; and it appears to have been accompanied with an insolent contempt of his former miracles. Jesus observing this, *therefore groaned in himself.*

The same temper of mind Jesus expressed in several similar circumstances of his life. We are told by the evangelist Mark *, that when the Jews upbraided and despised him, notwithstanding all the

* Mark iii. 5.

convincing evidences he had given of his divine authority, *he looked round on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.* Again, when the Pharisees asked him a sign from heaven, tempting him, * *he sighed deeply in his spirit.*

In like manner, we are told by the same evangelist †, that when he came out, and saw much people, *he was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd;* (that is) had no well-instructed and faithful teacher to lead them in the way to everlasting life; and therefore, the evangelist immediately adds, *he began to teach them many things.* Thus also towards the conclusion of his life, † *when he beheld the city of Jerusalem,* in which he had delivered his divine instructions and wrought his mighty works, he wept over it, because its inhabitants would not learn of him the things that

* Mark viii. 12.

† Mark vi. 34.

† Luke xix. 41.

concerned

concerned their everlasting peace : weeping over it, he said, *O if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace !* In the same spirit of divine benevolence and pity, when he perceived the obstinacy of the Jews who put the question, *Could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died ?* Jesus groaning in himself cometh to the grave.

This, brethren, was another cause of our Saviour's distress, peculiar to himself ; and it appeared with a peculiar propriety and beauty in his character and station, as the Saviour of the world. The external and transient calamities of human life, on all occasions, moved our Saviour's compassion ; but the internal and permanent calamities of their immortal souls ; their ignorance, their depravity or guilt ; and the misery to which they stood exposed in the eternal world, touched him with a peculiar tenderness and pity ; these, in a distinguished manner

manner, drew groans and sighs from the bottom of his heart, and made his eyes to stream with tears.

Having endeavoured to explain our Saviour's conduct in this passage of his life, I am next to offer a few reflections on the subject.

1st, Let us observe the character and spirit of the Son of God, *when he was made flesh and dwelt among us*. Every sentiment or affection in the heart of man, that is fitted to excite our approbation and esteem, resided in the mind that was in *Christ*; and every thing that is approvable and lovely in the life of man, adorned his manners. More especially the mild and gentle virtues of humanity and mercy eminently marked his character. The truth of this reflection may appear from the whole history of his life: it appears in a very striking manner, from the interesting and pathetic passage we have been considering.

If

If a generous compassion for the afflictions of humanity, and a tender sympathy with the sorrow of our friends; if the most benevolent efforts to give support and consolation under them; if these are the most amiable endowments of a human character, and the properest objects of our love, they were, in an eminent degree, the endowments of *the mind that was in Christ Jesus*, and entitle him to the warmest love and affection of our hearts.

2dly, We may observe how happy it would be for the followers of Christ, was the same mind in *them* that was in *him*. How much harmony and kind affection would it spread into their society and intercourse with one another, and how much consolation and support would it give them under their afflictions? Their mutual tenderness and sympathy, and their mutual exchange of every office of humanity and mercy, would extinguish one half of the miseries of life.

The merciful Author of our Nature, foreseeing the calamities to which men would be exposed in their progress through this world, implanted in their hearts that social tenderness and sympathy whereby they are fitted, either to remove, or greatly to alleviate each other's affliction and distress. The instructions and example of our blessed Lord call upon his friends to cultivate and exercise this tenderness and sympathy on every proper opportunity occurring in the course of providence : and were their hearts and lives formed upon the influence of these instructions, and of this example, the church of Christ would immediately become the happiest and the most amiable society on earth. In the highest sense of the expression, * *Mount Zion would become beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth.*

3dly, From this passage of our Saviour's life, we may observe, that the sympathetic

* Ps. xlviii. 2.

sorrow of a compassionate and feeling heart, afflicted by the loss of a beloved and virtuous friend, is not inconsistent with the submission which we owe to the will of Providence. Were this the case, our blessed Saviour, who in every circumstance was perfectly submissive to the will of God, would not have groaned, and wept, and mingled his tears with the weeping friends of Lazarus, in the manner here described by the evangelist ; but in place of this he would have blamed and reprehended their distress. Sorrow for the loss of a beloved friend is *then* only inconsistent with a dutiful submission to the will of God when it is willingly fomented and indulged, and refuses to admit that blessed consolation and relief which is suggested by religion and the gospel of the Son of God. Agreeably to this, our blessed Saviour, without condemning the affliction of his friends, only directed their attention to those important springs of consolation

which are opened in the gospel. *I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever believeth in me shall never die.* The gospel requires, and Jesus himself exemplified a meek submission to the will of God in every appointment of his providence; but the submission which it requires, and of which he set us the example, is not inconsistent with the sorrow which proceeds from those kind affections which were implanted in our nature by the hand of God.

4thly, In the same light we may observe, that a sympathizing heart and gentleness of manners is not inconsistent with the fortitude and strength of mind with which we ought to bear the calamities of life. They were remarkably united in the life of Jesus Christ. He melted into tears when he beheld the ignorance, the wickedness, and the miseries of men around him, whilst

he,

he stood undaunted and serene under all his personal afflictions.

In the passage now before us, two circumstances in the conduct of our Saviour merit our particular attention. 1st, The friendship and humanity which he expressed to the mourning friends of Lazarus. 2dly, The noble and exalted sense of piety which he mingled with his friendship and humanity. As soon as he had paid the tribute of a feeling heart to the affliction of his friends, he resumed his native dignity, and endeavoured to soften their distress and raise their drooping spirits by the heavenly consolations of the gospel. He thus taught them, that however innocent their sorrow for the death of Lazarus might be, yet it was their duty to support it, and to learn submission to the will of God under it, and all the other afflictions of this life ; by the prospect of *that life and immortality which he had brought to light.*

5thly, From this passage of our Saviour's life, we may observe how much comfort his friends may draw from the thought of their connection with him, and of their interest in his friendship. A feeling heart, in its affliction, flies to the sympathy and fellow-feeling of its friends, and from thence derives a powerful consolation and relief. Christians, your compassionate Redeemer, who wept at Lazarus' grave, and mingled his tears with those of his mourning friends, knows every affliction which you suffer in this world, is touched with a feeling sense of your infirmity, and is ever ready to stretch forth his hand for your assistance and relief.

6thly, The last reflection which I offer on this subject is, that if *the mind which was in Christ* appears in such an agreeable and endearing light, from this passage of his life, how much more endearing should it be to us, when we view it in the last period of his life, when he suffered on the cross

cross as the Saviour of our souls. In that singular event, we behold the Son of God, not only shedding tears for the miseries of men, but with his tears shedding also his most precious blood. In this respect, the life and death of the blessed Jesus have a most remarkable connexion and similitude. His life was wholly spent in offices of mercy ; he stretched forth his hand for the relief of every object of distress which he met with in this world. After he had thus employed his life ; he went to death in the exercise of the same compassionate concern for the miseries of men, giving himself to be an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.

From the whole of what hath been offered we may observe, how precious this Redeemer of the world should appear to them who believe, and to every one who has the opportunity of being made acquainted with his history ! If there was ever a character exhibited on the theatre of

this world, fitted at once to engage the love and raise the admiration of the heart of man, it was undoubtedly that of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. What an amiable tenderness and sensibility, when he beheld the miseries of men and the afflictions of his friends ; and, at the same time, what a sublime dignity and strength of mind, under all his personal afflictions, appears in the history of his life and death ! These, invariably blended with each other in the whole of his deportment, render him, beyond comparison, the most amiable and venerable person that ever the world saw ; and *that* man must be lost to the best impressions of humanity who does not, on being made acquainted with his character, regard him as the worthiest object of his love and admiration. *If the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost ; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them.*

DISCOURSE XVII.

The Temper and Conduct of the
Bereans: Or the Duty of search-
ing the Scriptures.

[Preached at the Meeting of the Synod of
Glasgow, April 1743.]

ACTS xvii. 11.

*These were more noble than those of Thes-
salonica, in that they received the word
with all readiness of mind, and searched
the scriptures daily, whether these things
were so.*

THE connection of these words with
the preceding context stands thus:
After the apostle Paul and Silas had preach-
ed

ed the gospel at Thessalonica, with some success, the Jews, who resided in that city, and were enemies of the apostles ministry, raised an insurrection against them; and by the assistance of the baser sort, broke in to the house where the apostles lodged, with an intention to expose them to the fury of the populace. The apostle and Silas were, however, in the night-time, secretly conveyed out of the city, and went from thence into Berea, a city of Macedonia, where they likewise preached the gospel. The different reception which they met with in that place, and the different behaviour of the Bereans towards them, make the subject of the text. *These*, says the sacred historian, *were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.* In which words the two following things are to be considered :

First,

First, The disposition and behaviour of the Bereans, with relation to the apostles, and the doctrine which they taught. It is thus described; *They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.*

2dly, The excellence of this disposition and behaviour, signified by the following expression; *They were more noble than those of Thessalonica.*

1st, *They received the word with all readiness of mind*; that is, they listened with attention to the doctrine of the apostles, concerning Jesus, and weighed the force of what they had said, in order to convince them that he was the Christ. The Bereans thus discovered that candour and integrity, whereby the mind of every man should lie open to conviction, and be at all times willing to embrace religious truth, when it is offered, and supported by sufficient evidence.

2dly,

2dly, *They daily searched the scriptures, whether these things were so.* That is, they carefully inquired, if what they had learned from Paul and Silas, was agreeable to the writings of Moses and the prophets. Hereby, to the candour and readiness of mind, with which they received the word, they joined the prudence and deliberation with which every wise man should form his judgment and belief in matters of religion. Although the Bereans did not, at first view, reject the apostle's doctrine, as groundless or incredible, because of its novelty, or apparent inconsistency with their former apprehensions; yet they did not implicitly submit their judgment to their single assertion and authority; but they searched the scriptures, which were the decisive standards of religious truth; being determined, *by these*, to fix their judgment and belief concerning what they had heard from the apostles.

This

This disposition and conduct of the Bereans, suggests an important duty incumbent upon every Christian ; more especially upon those who are employed as the ministers and teachers of the gospel, viz. To preserve, at all times, a readiness of mind to receive the doctrines of religion, when they are proposed with proper evidence ; and to examine their authority by the infallible standard of holy scripture. This is a duty of such importance in the conduct of a minister of the gospel, that it is not possible to conceive how, in the neglect of it, he can discharge the commission which is given him, with a becoming reverence towards God, or with faithfulness to men.

In discoursing farther on this subject, it is proposed, by divine assistance, to inquire, by what methods, and in what respects, Christians may depart from this important duty, and may thereby unhappily obstruct the interests and progress of religion.

1st,

1st, Christians depart from the duty recommended by the example in the text, when they form their religious opinions upon the systems of human wisdom and philosophy, undirected by the light of revelation; and by *these* direct their judgments of the doctrines of the gospel. It is, I believe, universally acknowledged, that there can be nothing in divine revelation which is inconsistent with the dictates of sound reason; nothing that is in itself absurd or opposite to those conceptions of the Divine Character and Providence which are suggested by the genuine light of nature. But does it follow as a consequence from this, that whatever appears to us plausible and likely to be true upon the principles of reason and of sound philosophy, is to be maintained, as certain and undoubted truth; inconsistent with which nothing is to be admitted in a revelation that comes from
God

God, though supported by all the proper marks of his authority?

There is this obvious argument against our judging of the truths of revelation in this manner, viz. that various appearances occur in the scheme of providence, which, had it not been for the evidence of certain and unquestionable facts, we should have deemed impossible, under the administration of an infinitely wise and perfect Providence. Would not, for instance, the wisdom and philosophy of men, prior to their observation of what happens in this world, have readily determined, that vice and misery could not have been admitted, or suffered to remain amongst the creatures of an infinitely wise and benevolent Creator? Would not this have been established as, at least, a very probable deduction from the acknowledged perfections of his nature? And still, after all the repeated efforts of human wisdom to account for this appearance in the works of God, does

does it not, and will it not probably remain an inexplicable mystery to the end of time? or if the supposition had been made, that possibly vice might be permitted to enter into the works of God, would it not have been thought a very probable, if not a certain consequence, that it would meet with immediate and strong expressions of divine displeasure; expressions far more immediate and strong than we now see; and that the sinner would be distinguished from the righteous man, in a much more conspicuous and striking manner than is done by the present scheme of Providence?

From these observations (and others might be added to the same effect) we may infer, that it is presuming, by far too much, upon the wisdom of the human understanding, to determine what ought or what ought not to be contained in a revelation that comes from God, or to think that whatever is conjectured or suggested by the wisdom of men as likely to be true,

true, is to be held as a certain and unquestionable truth, and therefore, as a sufficient reason for rejecting what is opposite, although it should be contained in a well-attested revelation of the mind of God.

When the subject of our inquiry does not relate to the original and first principles of religion, (with which it is acknowledged nothing can be inconsistent in a revelation that comes from God), but only to what appears to be their probable and likely consequence; it deserves our serious inquiry, if great caution and reserve, and a humble resignation of our own wisdom, be not highly proper and becoming us; and a necessary branch of that modesty and candour with which we ought to *search the scriptures whether these things are so.*

If God has solemnly revealed, that certain measures are established by him, with relation to the pardon and recovery of sinful creatures, ought men, in their present

state of ignorance, and who see and understand so small a part of the scheme of Providence, reject the revelation as incredible, because it does not suit their wisdom and philosophy, or exactly correspond with the notions they had previously conceived of the divine administration. Is not this an inexcusable arrogance and pride of understanding in such short-sighted creatures as mankind are? In many cases a greater deference and regard is paid to the judgment of our fellow-men, even when we cannot account for the measures of their conduct, than is, in this case, required to the judgment of the All-wise God, whose ways are *unsearchable and past finding out*?

2dly, Christians depart from the duty recommended in the text, when they direct and determine their belief in the doctrines of religion, upon the credit and authority of any single man, or society of men, how much soever distinguished by their piety

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or learning, or soundness in the faith. Very different from this was the conduct of the Bereans, applauded by the sacred historian in the text; *they searched the scriptures daily to see if things were so*, as the apostles had represented them. It is true, every Christian, at least every Protestant, is ready to declare, that his faith is founded upon sacred scripture, and that by its authority he judges, in the last resort, of the doctrines and degrees of every order or society of men upon earth. But in order to act agreeably to this profession, ought we not, with all possible diligence and candour, search the holy scriptures, and in this search, labour to exclude every attachment and regard, but a sacred reverence for truth, and a sincere desire to perceive the mind and will of God, as they have declared it? On the other hand, is it not an entire departure from this protestant profession, if before, or during the continuance of our search, we have pre-established

certain creeds or systems of religious belief, as the truths of God; and *then* search the scriptures, not with an unbiassed and impartial desire to *see if things are so*, but to find them so as we have apprehended them, and to find out the most specious and plausible arguments in their defence? More especially, is it not an evident departure from this Protestant profession, either to put a stop to our own inquiries after truth, or to prohibit and discourage other men's inquiries after it, by an ultimate appeal to any other standard of religious truth than the word of God, recorded in the sacred scriptures? It may, therefore, deserve the serious inquiry of every good man, if this manner of proceeding be not inconsistent with the regard and reverence which we owe to God, and to the revelation of his mind in holy scripture, and altogether opposite to the commandment of our Saviour, that we should *call no man Rabbi, or Master, upon earth*. If
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the scriptures are regarded by us as the word of God, undoubtedly the lowest mark of our regard is to search their meaning and contents with all possible candour and attention, without resting in the decisions or authority of men, though of the highest reputation for piety and wisdom.

3dly, Christians depart from the duty and example recommended in the text, when they treat their fellow Christians with marks of contempt, hatred and wrath, because, in the course of their inquiry after truth, they have fallen into what is apprehended to be error and mistake. When men contend for what they take to be the truth with vehemence and wrath; when they indulge themselves in virulent reflections on the character of such as happen to be of a different judgment from themselves; it is impossible to preserve that candour and impartiality by which they should, at all times, lie open to the evidence of truth, and *search the scriptures whe-*

ther things are so, as they have apprehended them ; nay, this state of mind totally destroys that charity and mutual forbearance among Christians, which the apostle * hath declared to be *the end of the commandment*, with a view to which, therefore, all our searches after truth ought to be conducted. It may, on this account, merit the particular and serious attention of the ministers and friends of Jesus Christ, how far their temper and conduct is in this respect, agreeable to the spirit and precepts of the gospel, how far it may advance or obstruct the cause of truth and the progress of religion in the world. There are especially the following particulars, relating, first to the cause, and secondly to the effects of that severity with which many Christians have been apt to treat one another in their religious debates, which deserve to be attended to.

* 1 Tim. i. 5.

1st, It may deserve a serious inquiry, whether that severity does not arise, at least in some degree, from the want of a thorough diligence and candour in our own inquiries. Do not those who search for truth with the greatest diligence and candour, find so much fallibility and weakness in themselves, as disposes them to bear, with the greater charity and mercy, the errors and mistakes of their fellow Christians? Are not such inquirers conscious to themselves, that in the course of their inquiries they have been oftentimes involved in some degrees of darkness and perplexity, have been forced oftentimes to differ from themselves, even when their consciences could not accuse them of dishonesty or prejudice? Will they not, on these accounts, always make the most favourable allowances for those who have unfortunately fallen into error and mistake? Will they not perceive, from the experience of their own fallibility and weakness, that their error

and mistake may be consistent with an honest heart and a sincere inquiry after truth?

2dly, It may deserve a serious inquiry, whether that severity with which Christians have often treated one another in their theological debates, does not proceed rather from a fond attachment to themselves, and the reputation of their own understanding and discernment, than from a disinterested zeal for God and the cause of truth. The apostle James hath told us *, that *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*. It deserves to be inquired into, if this same *wrath of man* can ever flow from a pure disinterested zeal for God. Zeal for God, and for the truths of God, when uncorrupted by the self-love, the vanity and pride of man, will always be accompanied with that composure and tranquility which natively proceeds from a full conviction that the cause and truths of God reject

James i. 20.

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the aids of human anger and severity, and need no other support or defence than a fair impartial search into the scriptures.

Self-love and pride are usually the strongest passions in the human heart; and men are apt to feel the highest transports of anger and severity when they are opposed. It is therefore worthy of our attention and inquiry, if a pure disinterested zeal for God can produce the same effects that are produced by the selfishness, the vanity and pride of man. The *wisdom that is from above*, says the apostle James †, is *peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, and full of mercy*. When a different and opposite influence prevails, have we not reason to suspect that we *know not what manner of spirit we are of*, but are substituting the wrath of man in the place of zeal for God? it is to be observed, that those who have either framed or adopted artificial systems of theology, and who ex-

† James iii. 17.

hibit them to others as the standards of religious truth, usually contend with greater earnestness and zeal for the distinguishing tenets and language of their several systems, than for the practical and plain doctrines of the gospel ; for *the words which man's wisdom teacheth, rather than for the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth*. And does not this give us cause to apprehend that the self-love and pride of man lies, at bottom, under the disguise of zeal for God?

3dly, It may farther merit a serious inquiry, if that severity with which Christians have been apt to treat one another in their religious disputes, be not owing to, or much increased by, their hastily affixing consequences of a dangerous and hurtful nature to the opinions of those with whom they are contending, and from thence judging to the disadvantage of their moral and religious character. A small acquaintance with the history of the Christian church may be sufficient to suggest
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the reasons of this inquiry, and the importance of our being cautious and reserved in this particular. We may imagine that we see very hurtful consequences connected with the errors which we are desirous to oppose, and may thereby labour to excuse our hatred and enmity to those by whom they are maintained. But all the while it ought to be remembered, that our erring brother may neither own nor see these hurtful consequences; may have an equal aversion to them with ourselves; and would be ready to abandon his mistakes, did he see them to be connected in the manner we have done. To judge therefore of our brother's character, and the dispositions of his heart, from what we have judged to be the consequence of his mistake, is altogether inconsistent with the charity, the equity, and candour, with which Christians of every denomination ought to treat one another, in conducting their religious debates. This remark deserves

serves the greater notice and attention, that it is difficult to say, that any one of the contending parties among Christians have kept themselves entirely free from this injustice.

Lastly, When our brother falls into an error, in the course of his religious inquiries, before we take upon us to condemn him, ought we not calmly to inquire, if, in his particular situation, his error may not be perfectly consistent with the piety and uprightness of his heart? Is he, by his error, alienated from the love of God, from the faith and obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, from any of the virtues of the Christian life, or from what the apostle calls, *the fruits of the spirit*? Or does he not, besides shewing all the essential marks of a sincere inquiry after truth, discover a sincere attachment to all the duties of his Christian profession? If this appears to be the case, is it not a stronger motive to the exercise of charity and friendship,

ship, than any of his supposed mistakes can be for hatred and severity? Have we withal made all those just allowances for that variety in the understandings and capacities of men, in the methods of their education, in the conversation, examples, and authority, which they have been taught and accustomed to regard from their earliest years, which may easily produce a variety of judgments in many things, even amongst the most sincere and honest inquirers after truth?

If we have not given this requisite attention, nor made these just allowances, is it consistent with charity, nay with justice, to condemn our erring brother with severity, or to ascribe his error to the want of candour and sincerity; more especially, if we cannot say that we have made our own inquiries after truth with invariable candour, and have excluded every degree of prejudice and bias from our own hearts? Which of us will venture

ture to affirm that he is entirely free from every prejudice, and is perfectly enlightened in the knowledge of religious truth? If we dare not venture to insist on this, is it not presumptuous, is it not unsuitable to that humility and modesty which becometh every one of us in our present weak and erring state, to condemn our brother with severity, because of his supposed mistakes? Might not the admonition which the meek and lowly Jesus gave the Pharisees, when they prosecuted, with a proud severity, the woman taken in adultery, be applied here with some propriety; * *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her?* A just impression of our own remaining prejudice and errors would undoubtedly conduct us to the exercise of lenity and charity, in judging of the errors and mistakes of our fellow Christians.

Having endeavoured to describe the origin and causes of that severity with which

* John viii. 7.

Christians have been too apt to treat one another in their theological debates, we are next to inquire into the unhappy consequences and effects of it. And,

1st, It may deserve our serious consideration and inquiry, how far it is destructive of that charity which our Saviour hath appointed to be the distinguishing mark of his disciples, and which his apostle has declared to be *the end of the commandment, and the bond of perfectness*. Amidst those eager and contentious debates in which the Christian church has been unhappily involved, and those innumerable parties and denominations by which it has been as unhappily distinguished, it claims the serious attention and inquiry of every good Christian, what is the temper and behaviour, with relation to these divisions and debates, which is most agreeable to the spirit and precepts of the gospel, and most conducive to the interest and progress of religion? In this inquiry, two very different characters

acters will occur and present themselves to his reflections.

1st, The character of the modest, inquisitive, charitable Christian, who makes it the business of his life to search the scriptures with seriousness and candour, and an humble dependance upon God ; and who, with the same humility and candour, strives to regulate his life by what he finds to be the will of God ; but through the fallibility of human nature, and the weakness of our degenerate faculties, which no one can pretend to be exempted from, falls involuntarily into some errors and mistakes, whilst, however, he declares his own judgment, and bears the opposite opinion and judgment of his brethren, with meekness and humility ; nay, suffers with the like meekness and humility the enmity of a persecuting and bigotted zeal, and the many hard and odious names, with which his involuntary innocent mistakes have been reproached.

2dly,

2dly, The character of the man who, though orthodox and sound in his belief, has not, however, searched the scriptures to see *whether things are so*, but rests in the authority of human systems, believed to be deduced from sacred scripture;---or if he has searched the scriptures, has done it with a much less degree of diligence and candour, and under the bias of a previous attachment to his adopted system?---Or, in fine, whatever his inquiries may have been, or in whatever manner they have been conducted, contends, with vehemence and wrath, for what he apprehends to be the truth,---censures, with unjust severity, every one who differs from himself,---blackens and reproaches them with odious names,---and marks them out to their fellow Christians, as the proper objects of their hatred and wrath?---Which of these two is best entitled to our esteem, as the friend and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ?---Which of them ap-

pears to have the greatest share of the genius and spirit of his religion? -- With which of these two different characters would we wish to leave this world and appear before his judgment-seat?

3dly, It may deserve a serious inquiry, how far the rules of truth and justice, as well as of charity, are transgressed by that severity with which Christians have oftentimes conducted their religious debates? What, if by this severity we are blackening with opprobrious names, and are describing to ourselves and to the world, as the objects of indignation or contempt, the real friends of God, and the sincere disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Would it not exceedingly grieve the heart of a good man to find, that he had, in this manner, injured any one who belongs to Jesus Christ, and *beat his fellow-servant*; that he had condemned the man whom his Saviour has approved, and stamped
odious

odious epithets on those who shall hereafter appear with him in glory.

Happy it is for Christians, that they are not finally to stand or fall by the judgment of their fellow Christians ; but have their last appeal to him who alone can judge the heart of man, and therefore has reserved it, as his own prerogative, to fix their state in the eternal world ! It is to be hoped we shall then see, with pleasure, many of those unjust and cruel judgments, which Christians of different denominations have pronounced against each other, finally reversed ; and that many of the sincere and humble followers of Christ, whose virtue and sincerity has been unhappily traduced, shall have *their righteousness brought forth as the light, and their judgment as the noon-day.*

4thly, Another consequence of this severity, usually connected with the preceding one, may likewise deserve our serious attention, viz. The disunion of the hearts

and hands of well disposed and pious men, who might otherwise, by their united influence, happily promote those important ends of all religion in which they are agreed. What, if by a narrowness and pride of understanding, or by an intemperate and hasty zeal, we are shutting out from our society and friendship some of our fellow Christians, by whose joint influence and councils we might successfully advance those important interests of piety and practical religion, for which we are equally concerned ; and which, by our disunion, are unhappily neglected and forgot ? How often have the interests and the progress of religion been obstructed by this cause ?

On this head might it not, at least, be offered as a question that merits our attention, whether the real interests of Christianity and true religion have been served, by founding them upon the profession and belief of a series of speculative, perhaps intricate, unintelligible doctrines, artificially

ally connected and combined; and not rather on the acknowledgment and practice of those religious and moral virtues of the Christian life, which it is the purpose of all the doctrines of religion to promote; and whether this great purpose may not be secured, where different sentiments prevail about some of those speculative points which are put into the public standards of belief.

5thly, In the last place, it may deserve our serious inquiry, how far that severity of which we have been speaking, may create, or hath created, amongst the more licentious part of men, a deliberate and avowed contempt of all religion. Men of this character are extremely ready to observe and censure the misconduct of the friends of Christianity, and to draw arguments from thence to the prejudice and disadvantage of its cause. When therefore they observe them contending against each other in a violent and wrathful man-

ner about points of doctrine, (perhaps about the form of words) which cannot be deemed of such importance to the world, as to justify their struggle and debate; if especially they should observe them contending for doctrines, or expressions of their own contrivance, as of equal moment with the most obvious and useful truths and precepts of the gospel; how apt is this to lead them to the desperate conclusion, that the whole doctrines of the gospel are of no moment or authority; but are founded only on the imagination of some subtle visionary zealots.

This unhappy consequence is yet more likely to take place, if they shall observe the ministers and friends of Christianity denouncing, with severity, the curses of Almighty God against their fellow Christians, on account of their supposed mistakes, in whom, nevertheless, they can perceive the amiable and important virtues of the Christian life; and whose mistakes

takes they cannot but believe the most sincere inquiries after truth, may, from various causes, be led to entertain.

In fine, this consequence is still more likely to prevail, if it is observed, that amidst those eager and contentious debates, there is not to be found an equal zeal against those obvious and undoubted instances of immorality, which are opposite to the spirit and design of all religion: and, most of all, if, among the different parties of contending Christians, there appears the want of truth and justice, in their conduct towards one another, by limiting the marks of their esteem to those who are of their own party and denomination; by making the most exorbitant concessions, nay, the most unnatural stretches, to excuse their grossest crimes: whilst they treat the least indecency in those of an opposite persuasion, with the highest rigour and severity.

These observations are suggested, as the subject of a serious attention and inquiry, to the ministers and friends of Christianity: for, from appearances of this nature, there is reason to apprehend, that the cause of infidelity has drawn singular encouragement. Nothing indeed is more likely to disfigure the native excellence of Christianity, and obscure that light, whereby Christians are directed to *glorify their Father which is in heaven*, than their being alienated from each other in their hearts, or their indulging in themselves a spirit of bitterness and rancour; or (which is perhaps worse) denouncing the wrath of God against one another, under the semblance of compassion, and with a seemingly devout complacence; merely on account of the mistakes they happen to be led into in the course of their inquiries after truth, how distant soever their mistakes may be from the essence of religion. How apt is this appearance among Christians, to lead the
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more licentious and thoughtless part of mankind to conclude, that all the great truths of Christianity are equally uncertain; and the zeal of Christians in promoting them, no more than a passionate and vain contention for the honour of their own understanding and discernment; or that whatever evidence these truths may be supported by, men had better be without the knowledge of them altogether! How apt, withal, is this appearance to weaken the authority of those denunciations of divine displeasure, which are given in the gospel *against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men*? The infidel, and licentious part of mankind, observing these denunciations equally employed by the ministers and friends of Christianity, against one another, as against themselves, are tempted to conclude, that they are altogether frivolous; existing only in the imaginations of some proud, passionate, and superstitious men. It is not easy to say how much mischief

chief has, in this way, been done to the interests of true religion; and how much credit, and presumption, has been given to the cause of infidelity.

Upon the other hand, would it not, by the blessing of Almighty God, contribute greatly to the credit and progress of the gospel, could we let the world observe, that its ministers and friends being united in the faith of those obvious and important truths which are immediately connected with a devout and holy life, are united also in their hearts, and live together in the exercise of that charity *which is the end of the commandment*? Would not this discover to the world, that the Christian religion can produce the most amiable and useful virtue in the human heart, though at the same time, the most rare and difficult, viz. To think modestly and humbly of our own understanding; to perceive and acknowledge, with candour and sincerity, the merit and virtues of our fellow

low

low men, independent of their agreement in opinion with ourselves; and that, without, among the friends of Jesus Christ, the exercise of mutual forbearance, and the harmony of pious and humane affections, can supply the want, and answer all the purposes of that uniformity in judgment, which cannot be attained in the present fallible and erring state of human nature.

It is not meant, by any thing that has been said in the preceding part of this discourse, that any of the truths of God, delivered in the sacred scriptures, are matters of indifference, or of little moment; or that no hurtful consequence will arise from error, provided a man be honest and sincere in his inquiry after truth, or lastly, that the truths of God ought not to be contended for, and zealously maintained. It must be acknowledged, that erring from the truths of God, as delivered in the sacred oracles, must, in proportion to their moment, be of hurtful influence, by preventing

venting that religious improvement and comfort from them, with a view to which they were recorded in the scriptures. *For all scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* It must likewise be acknowledged, that it is the duty of every Christian, and especially of every Christian minister, to defend what he takes to be the truths of God, and to explode every opposite error and mistake. ---But let the zeal and contention of a Christian proceed upon a previous calm inquiry into the sacred scriptures, as the standard of his faith;---let his zeal and earnestness in its defence be conducted in the spirit of the gospel, and with an invariable regard to the rules of justice, charity, and mercy.---In fine, let him always remember, that the transgression of those rules can, on no account, and in no cause whatever, admit of any just excuse. This is all that is pleaded for in the preceding part of
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of the discourse ; and it is hoped the truth and justice of it will be owned by every denomination of professing Christians, how much soever contradicted in their conduct.

We should next proceed to the second head of the discourse, viz. To consider the nobleness of the disposition discovered by the Bereans, when they heard the apostles doctrine ; *They were more noble,* says the sacred historian, *than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.* Having insisted so long, in the preceding part of the discourse, I shall only just mention the following particulars:

1st, This diligence and candour in inquiring after truth, exemplified by the Bereans and recommended in the text, is the proper exercise of the human understanding in the most interesting subject about which it can be exercised ; and it is the circumstance which gives value to our
belief

belief of the doctrines of the gospel. It is indeed hard to say where the merit of an orthodox belief consists, if it has not been established in consequence of a diligent and impartial search into the scriptures.

2dly, The disposition and conduct of the Bereans commended in the text, is an essential branch of probity and virtue in the heart of man. It discovers, that the love of truth and right is the leading principle and motive of the heart, and that, from this principle, the honest man is ready to resign every pre-conceived and favourite opinion of his own ; unless, upon a calm and fair examination, it appears to be supported by the word of God. This probity of mind, and candid submission to the evidence of truth seems to have been the principal circumstance in the conduct of Nathaniel, when *, upon the information of his friend, he went to see Jesus, and to inquire, in spite of every prejudice,

* John i. 45.

if he was the Christ ; for which, therefore, he obtained that honourable testimony from our Saviour himself, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.*

3dly, The disposition and conduct commended in the text, gives an honourable idea of our Maker. It represents him as approving his reasonable creatures, when they employ their understandings in examining the authority and meaning of the revelation of his will which he has given them ; and thereby treating them in a liberal and gentle manner, as a father treats his children ; whereas the opposite idea of him, as displeased with our impartial searches after truth, and as commanding our belief, without affording us sufficient evidence, is to represent him as a tyrannical and arbitrary master ; like the *austere man* mentioned in the gospel †, *taking up what he laid not down, and reaping where he had not sowed.* It gives with-

† Luke xix, 21.

al, an honourable view of the doctrines of the gospel, as lying open to the most exact and impartial search, and as *then* most likely to be received, when they are examined with the greatest diligence and candour. An opposite behaviour dishonours the truths of God, and puts them on a footing with those fabulous impostures which cannot bear the light of a fair and impartial review.

Upon the whole of what hath been offered, let it be considered, that as it cannot be thought a matter of small importance, in what manner the ministers of Christ fulfil the ministry committed to their trust; it cannot be therefore thought a matter of small importance, whether they maintain that candour and impartiality by which their minds should lie always open to the best information they are able to receive about the most successful method of discharging it. The obligations they are under to perform, with
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faithfulness and care, the duties of their office, should lead them to examine, with equal faithfulness and care, what these duties are, and to search the scriptures daily to obtain a more exact and perfect view of them.

The ministers of religion are, by their profession, called to plead the cause for which the Son of God came into this world; and by the light and direction of his gospel, to lead the rest of mankind in the way to everlasting life. In an office of this nature, ought they not to feel a *reverend and holy fear*, lest the important cause committed to their care should, by their own ignorance, inattention, or misconduct, be obstructed in their hands?

The following reflections, or reflections to the same effect, should be oftentimes, with great seriousness, revolving in their minds; “Are we singled out by Providence to preach the everlasting gospel of the Son of God, and carry on the great

VOL. III.

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“ designs for which he came from heaven ;
“ and must we not be deemed highly criminal and inexcusable, if by carelessness
“ or prejudice, by a sinful or imprudent
“ conduct, or by omitting what we ought
“ to do in the fulfilment of our ministry,
“ these great designs should be either entirely frustrated, or not promoted to
“ that degree they might have been, by
“ a right improvement of the means and
“ opportunities which God has given us ?
“ What, if by inattention, prejudice, or
“ the want of an impartial search into
“ the scriptures, we should sow in some
“ minds the seeds of superstition, bitterness and strife, in place of *pure and undefiled religion* ; or in others, the seeds of
“ infidelity, and a disposition to despise
“ every appearance of religion ? Are we
“ faithful to the chief shepherd of the
“ sheep, or to the flock committed to our
“ care ; till we can affirm, that without
“ relying on the wisdom and authority of
“ men,

“ men, we have searched the scriptures
“ with all the diligence and candour in
“ our power ; have learned from thence
“ what we ought to teach, as the ministers
“ of Christ ; and endeavoured to model
“ our instructions by this sacred standard,
“ in spite of every opposition and dis-
“ couragement, from the ignorance, the
“ prejudice, or the wickedness of men.”

Did such reflections as these, habitually revolving in our breasts, produce that candid, serious, and humble state of mind, with which they ought justly to inspire us, we might expect (by the divine blessing) that the public ministrations of the gospel would be attended with a more remarkable success ; and that we should soon see an issue put to those unchristian animosities which have sadly eat away the life of true religion amongst many of its professors, which have also sadly hurt the reputation of the gospel amongst the more dissipated and licentious part of men.

148 *The Temper and Conduct, &c.*

In fine, did the temper and conduct, recommended by the text, universally prevail amongst the ministers and friends of Jesus Christ, we might hope to see, ere long, that blessed period of the church, ** when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the young lion, and the fawning together.---When the cow and the bear shall feed, and their young ones lie down together. When the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den; and they shall not destroy in all my holy mountain.*

• Isa. xi. 6.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

On Religious Education.

PROV. xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go.

BESIDES the general duties of life equally incumbent upon every man, there are some special ones, arising from the different situations in which we are placed by Providence. Of these no one seems to claim a more particular attention and regard than the education and discipline of children, by those to whom Providence has committed this important trust. This, you see, is the duty recommended in the text, *Train up a child in the way he should go.*

By the way in which a child should go, we are to understand, that religious course of life which it is the purpose of this book of Proverbs to explain and recommend; the *beginning of which is the fear of the Lord*: and to train up a child in this way, is to lead him to the knowledge of it, and to a due sense of its importance before he be seduced and corrupted by the world.

In discoursing on the subject, it is proposed, by divine assistance,

1st, To explain the nature of this duty, and the manner in which it ought to be performed.

2dly, To represent the importance of the duty, and enforce the practice of it.

The duty itself may be explained under three heads; Instruction, Example, and Authority. In the first place, children should be trained up in *the way they should go*; by their being instructed in those great principles and duties of a religious life, by which they ought to regulate their future conduct.

conduct. 2dly, By the example which is set before them ; from whence children usually receive the deepest and most durable impressions. 3dly, By the influence of that authority which Providence may have given us over the minds of children.

1st, The education of children should begin by instructing them in the knowledge of the nature and duties of a religious life ; and by leading them to see their indispensable importance to their future happiness. With this view they must be taught the knowledge of those moral, religious, and Christian truths on which the obligations of religion stand, and by which they are enforced. Unless they are instructed in this manner, we shall attempt to build the superstructure without having laid the requisite foundation : and all our attempts will soon be baffled by the opposite instructions and impressions of the world. Hence, in the account which is given of Abraham's conduct to his family

and children, for which he is so honourably distinguished in the sacred records; his instructing them in the knowledge of their duty and of the laws of their Creator is particularly taken notice of. † *I know him, says the Almighty, that he will command his household, and his children after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.*

This however is a more delicate and difficult employment, and requires more attention, in order to secure its influence and success, than is commonly imagined. I pretend not to offer such remarks upon the subject as you are unacquainted with, but only to put you in remembrance of such remarks as may deserve a more particular attention than is usually given them. The following observations, in particular, may deserve your notice.

1st, The instructions that are given to children should be of a plain, practical,

† Gen. xviii. 19.

and simple nature ; or such as have an obvious and immediate tendency to form the temper of their hearts and to regulate their future conduct. The more mysterious and sublime doctrines of religion, whatever useful purpose they may serve in riper years, seem not, however, to be the earliest and first instructions that should be given to children. They are not able to comprehend their meaning and significance, far less to apply them to the purposes of practical religion.

In the common arts of life, we would reckon it abundantly absurd to begin the education of a learner with the more abstruse and nicer secrets of the art he is to learn. No ! a wise artist will begin with the most obvious and simple principles, and from thence lead his pupil to the higher and more curious refinements of his art. The same plan ought to be observed in teaching children the supreme art of living well.

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They ought, in the first place, to be instructed in the nature of a virtuous and religious life, and have the laws and measures of it plainly laid before them. The nature, and the influence of piety to God, the faith, and love, and imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ; the exercise of truth, justice, of forgiveness and compassion, in their conduct towards men, and of temperance and purity in the government of themselves, these and every other branch of practical religion should be set before them in the most obvious and simple manner. * *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, they should be taught to think on these things, and to esteem and practise them.* To such practical instructions, the recommendation given to Abra-

* Phil. iv. 8.

ham seems particularly to refer; for it is added, as the immediate consequence of his commanding *his household and children after him; They shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.*

Being thus instructed in the nature of their duty, they ought, with equal plainness and simplicity, be taught the obligations they are under to observe it, and the motives that should induce them to it.

There are particularly these two obvious and simple motives, that should with care be presented to their view.

1st, The native excellence and beauty of a virtuous life, and the ornament and grace it will put upon their character. In this manner Solomon hath directed us to instruct our children; * *Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father.---Wisdom is the principal thing; and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee. She shall bring thee to honour*

* Prov. iv. 1.

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when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace ; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. After this example, children should be taught to see the excellence and beauty of a virtuous life, and the opposite deformity of wickedness. The different appearances of piety and profaneness, of veracity and falsehood, of humanity and cruelty, of modesty and impudence, of sobriety and drunkenness, should be set before the minds of children ; and if they are set before them in a proper manner, they will scarcely fail strongly to perceive and feel the difference.

Alongst with these representations of the native excellence and beauty of a virtuous life, children should be taught to see its immediate connexion with the future happiness and comfort of their lives : the tranquillity and self-enjoyment it will give, the esteem and honour with their friends, and the security and credit in every business of life, it is fitted to produce : Together
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with the opposite disquietude, dishonour, and unhappiness, which as natively proceed from a vicious and immoral conduct.

2d, Add to this description of the native excellence of a virtuous life, that it is the will and law of their Creator, and the requisite foundation of his favour and regard.

This idea should, with the greatest care, be early planted in the minds of children; because it will prove the only sufficient counterpoise to the opposite seducements and temptations to a sinful life, to which they are to be exposed; and happy it will be, if even this strong and solemn tie be sufficient to preserve their innocence. Thus too does the wise man direct us to instruct our children; * *My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments—So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God.* † *For the ways of man are before the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.*

* Prov, iii. 1.

† Prov, v. 21.

In representing these important obligations, such descriptions of their duty should be given them, as tend to settle this conviction in their minds, that religion is a joyful thing, and the immediate source of cheerfulness and pleasure. Childhood and youth, are naturally fond of pleasure: if religion is described, or exemplified before them, as a sour, melancholy, or joyless thing, it is the surest way to excite their aversion and distaste. But if ever we are so happy as to engage their esteem, and choice of it, it must be by convincing them, that it is the genuine source of cheerfulness and pleasure; and that our solicitude to lead them to it, proceeds from our benevolent concern for their happiness and joy. And here no disguise or artifice is requisite, but a simple representation of the real nature of the case; which, could we cause them to perceive, their taste for pleasure would itself lead them to a virtuous life; and make them experience the truth of what the wise
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king has affirmed of religious wisdom;
That her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and that all her paths are peace.

2dly, Another important circumstance
to be observed in the instruction which are
given to children, is, that they be given
in a soft and gentle manner; and with as
little appearance of rigour and restraint as
possible. Children naturally hate whatever
has the appearance of restraint upon their
liberty. The lessons of religion, when
they are given them in the way of solemn
precept and authority, (because they may
not see their wisdom and importance) are
extremely apt to be viewed by them in
this unfavourable light. They are ready
to consider them as the dictates of that se-
verity, caution, and reserve, which may
become the more advanced and graver pe-
riods of life; but unsuitable to that liberty
and ease, in which they think the gayer
periods of life may be indulged.

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This prejudice, if possible, should be carefully prevented. When at any time it is necessary to give the lessons of religion in a serious and solemn manner, they ought, nevertheless, to be accompanied with such mild and gentle reasonings, as may persuade them of their wisdom and importance; and convince them that they flow not merely from authority, but from our knowledge and sense of their importance; and our benevolent concern for their happiness and welfare. Added to the more formal and direct instructions that are given them, all proper opportunities should be embraced, of conveying the same instructions to their minds in such an indirect, and accidental way, as may prevent that appearance of restraint upon their liberty, of which they are disposed to be so jealous. A sense of God, and of the importance of religious virtue, may be awakened in the minds of children, when it does not appear that this is our deliberate design

design. They should be made to hear from the conversation of their parents, and superiors, (as it were by accident) such sentiments and views of things as tend to recommend religion to their approbation and esteem; as tend to make them see that *our* lives are made happy by its influence upon our hearts; and that *their* lives also would be happy, were they influenced and governed by the same sense of things. These seemingly occasional, and undesigned instructions, are more likely to be admitted into the minds of children, who are suspicious of the more solemn and formal lessons that are given them, as if they meant to set unnatural restraints upon their liberty.

The second particular, under which it was proposed to illustrate the duty recommended in the text, is the example which we ought to set before children in their earlier years. This was comprehended in that solemn declaration, that was made by

Joshua a little before his death; * *Choose you this day whom ye will serve: as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.* The same thing is signified by the royal Psalmist David; † *I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.*

This branch of duty in the education of children, is of singular importance, on these following accounts:

First, Because the religious instructions that are given them, unless they are recommended by a suitable example, will appear to them to be the dictates of arbitrary pleasure; perhaps of an imperious, tyrannical austeritv. Children will naturally thus judge and reason with themselves. Why are the instructions and rules of a religious life inculcated upon us, as of the highest importance to our happiness, when those by whom they are prescribed, treat them, in their own conduct, as things of no significance?

* Joshua xxiv. 15.

† Psalm ci. 2.

2d, The example which is given to children, is of the highest consequence; as from thence, usually, the deepest and most durable impressions are made upon their hearts. A desire of imitation, or of learning from example, is one of the first principles that discovers itself in human nature: and it is probable that the different characters, which we acquire in manhood, received their first beginnings, and gradually arose from the examples that were most familiar to us in our earlier years. More especially, the example which is given to children by their *parents*, has the strongest and most lasting influence; because Nature, some-how, teaches children to reverence and imitate their parents, till untoward accidents control this tendency of Nature. They naturally regard them in the more early periods of their life, as the models of excellence and wisdom; and thereby the opposite impressions of wisdom, or folly,

gain more easily admission into their hearts.

3d, The example which is set before children by their parents, especially in their behaviour, *when they walk within their house*, is the most undisguised and open part of life; and that which gives the truest representation of the state and temper of their hearts. A man's behaviour in the public scenes of life, is conducted with greater caution and reserve; and is oftentimes disguised by the rules of worldly policy and wisdom. But in those familiar, and freer hours of life, which are spent with our families at home, our true and real character, those sentiments and passions which have the chief ascendant in our hearts, are apt on all occasions to exert their power, and to shew us in our genuine and proper light.

For these reasons it appears to be a thing of principal importance, in *training up children*

dren in the way they should go, that nothing shall appear in the temper and conduct of their parents, or of those to whom their education is entrusted, that would seem to contradict, or impair the weight of the instructions which are given them ; or to give the least encouragement to what is bad. If this shall happen to be the case, parents will give, in the apprehension of a child, a stronger sanction and authority to wickedness, than they shall be able to give to virtue and religion, by the best instructions in their power.

The example, however, which is given to children, must not be concluded by a simple abstinence from what is bad ; but ought to be distinguished by every branch of religious virtue. Our example should excite in them a strong conviction, that the principles and rules of a religious life, which we have inculcated on *them*, are the principles and rules whereby we direct our *own* conduct through the world ; that

they are the springs of our *own* highest happiness and joy; and that it is the experience and consciousness of this, that makes us so solicitous to fix the impression of them on *their* hearts.

What has been observed on the head of good example, ought to be applied to every part of life. There are, however, two branches of a good example, which merit a particular attention, because they seem to have the most powerful and extensive influence on the minds of children.

1st, The example of a meek, gentle, and composed behaviour. This is particularly mentioned, not only on account of its native gracefulness and beauty, but because of the peculiar weight which it will give to all the other parts of our example; and because of the free access it is likely to procure to the instructions which are given to children. On the other hand, the turbulence of immoderate and wrathful passions in the conduct of domestic life, the
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symptoms of disorder and deformity, with which they are accompanied, strongly tend to excite a prejudice in the minds of children, against the instructions that are given them, and to weaken every effort we employ to *train them up in the way they should go*. He who is not able to *rule his own spirit*, is not likely to obtain the rule and conduct of the spirit of his family and children.

2dly, The example of piety to God, and of the regard which is due to the worship of his name. All the arguments that shew the obligations men are under to worship God in society with one another, plead in the strongest manner for the worship of him in our families. No connexions are so strong, so interesting and affectionate, as those which take place amongst parents and their children. If being connected together in our interests, united in our affections, attached to each other by every endearing tie that can cement the hearts of men, are

considerations fitted to prove our obligation to worship our Creator in society with one another, these considerations plead in the strongest manner for the practice of family devotion.

This duty, moreover, is not only in itself a rational and virtuous employment, founded on the principles of reason and humanity, but of the highest importance to the virtue of our children. It is to be thought that a man's children, or dependants, will either learn, or be able to retain a sense of Deity, and Providence, if in the example which is constantly presented to their view, and which Nature teaches them to reverence and esteem, no mark of homage is paid to their Creator; but the whole transactions of the family proceed from day to day, without any visible acknowledgment to Providence. It may be depended on with certainty, that when children go abroad into the world, they will think that nothing *there* deserves their notice

notice and regard, but what they have observed to be the object of regard at home : and let it be considered, I beseech you, what is to be expected as the consequence of a total neglect of religion in the conduct of domestic life.

Are not children, educated in this manner, sent abroad into the world devoid of that principle which can give the only tolerable security to the future innocence and comfort of their lives ? *That* man would be deemed a very unnatural and guilty parent, who showed no concern to preserve his child from those disorders and debaucheries which are destructive of his health, his peace, his industry, or his honour in this world. But let it be considered, that when a child is sent out into the world uneducated in the principles of piety to God, he is sent out, with all those important interests of life, unguarded and exposed. And it will certainly be found, that no principle will be able to give them a sufficient protection and security, but this principle
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of piety to God. It is wonderful to think, that the infinite importance of a religious education in this view of it should escape the notice and regard of parents who are otherwise respectable for their sense and virtue.

I conclude this head of the discourse, with the following remark :

That although the practice of family prayer and devotion has, through a false modesty, or from some other cause, unfortunately fallen much into disuse, yet the head, and father of a family, can scarcely appear in a nobler attitude, or with greater dignity, than when, in name of his family and children, and as their advocate and friend, he addresses for them the great Creator, and Father of the world; and implores, for them, the blessings of his goodness. Is it an agreeable and pleasant thing in the eye of every one, to see the father of a family labouring, by his virtuous and honest industry, to provide for the prosperity and comfort of his children? and is it a less agreeable and pleasant thing, to see

see him, after he has been thus virtuously employed, directing their devotion towards God; and imploring for them that protection of his providence and goodness, which alone can give success to his virtuous industry in their behalf, and be the firm foundation of their happiness either in this world, or in that which is to come.

3d, The last particular, under which it was proposed to illustrate the duty recommended in the text, is the exercise of that authority which Providence may have given us over the minds of children. This, indeed, without those means of instruction and example which have been described, will carry the appearance of austerity and violence, which always hurts the influence and success of a virtuous education; but, at the same time, without a due mixture of authority, instruction and example may, in many cases, be of a very feeble, unavailing influence.

By authority is meant, that privilege which Nature and Providence hath given to parents,

parents, of reprovng the enormity and folly of their children, of correcting and chastising them, when reproofs are ineffectual. To the exercise of this authority the wise man frequently refers in this book of proverbs. In this same chapter *, *Foolishness, he says, is bound in the heart of a child ; but the rod of correction shall drive it from him ;* and in another place, † *He that spareth his rod hateth his son ; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes. § The rod and reproof give wisdom ; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*

It was by the neglect of this authority, or because it was not exerted with that measure of energy and strength, which the circumstances of the case required, that Eli so heinously offended God, and had such a dreadful punishment denounced against him ‡. It appears from the history of this matter that Eli had very gravely

* Prov. xxii. 15.

† Prov. xiii. 24.

§ Prov. xxix. 15.

‡ 1 Sam. ii. 23.

and seriously rebuked his children for their crimes; yet because he had not used the privilege which Nature and Providence had given him, of restraining and chastising them, God threatened to bring down a perpetual desolation on his family.

This branch of duty stands opposed to that fond indulgence whereby children are permitted to proceed in their extravagance and folly, because of the apparent harshness and severity that may be requisite for their correction and restraint. By this effeminate and foolish fondness, oftentimes the greatest injury is done to children; and though we may gratify and please them for the present, and gain perhaps the return of a like capricious and blind regard, we are nevertheless leading them to future misery. The authority therefore of a parent, in reproof and restraining the folly of his child, is an essential and important part of the duty recommended in the text.

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At the same time, in the exercise of this authority, great caution is required, in order to its being attended with success. The following directions, in particular, appear to be of great importance.

1st, This authority should be employed with an entire freedom from the turbulence of wrath and passion; and with every possible expression of meekness and composure. When correction or reproof is given in a wrathful manner, it will hardly fail to disappoint the purpose for which it is administered. It will tend either to excite in children the unhappy apprehension, that by correcting *them*, we are only giving vent to our *own* ill-nature and severity; or it will lead them to believe that we are but bad examples of that virtue and piety which we inculcate upon *them*; since they will soon be able to perceive, that the turbulence and disorders of excessive wrath are inconsistent with those rules of life in which we have instructed them. The reproofs and corrections which are given to children,

children, ought therefore always to be given with calmness and composure ; and though calm, they may be strong ; nay, given in this manner, they will always be conveyed with the greatest energy and force ; as from thence it will appear, that our correction of them is the dictate of our understanding, and proceeds from our discernment of the hurtful consequences of their conduct, and not from our own peevishness or pride ; which if children believe to be the case, will sadly baffle the intended influence of our authority.

2d, Another important rule to be observed in the exercise of authority is, to mingle always with it, marks of tenderness and pity to the persons of our children. When methods of correction and severity are necessary, it should, however, appear, that we are forced to them against our choice ; that we ourselves feel the affliction which we give ; and that nothing could prevail with us to employ these methods of severity, but our knowledge and
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conviction of their absolute necessity to prevent the misery of our children. Without this, we shall, in the language of the apostle Paul, † *provoke our children to wrath, in place of bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

The whole measures, indeed, of a virtuous education should be so conducted, as that they may appear to be the discipline of love, and not the exercise of mere authority or power : and much better it is to work, if possible, upon the ingenuity, the gratitude, and honour of the human heart, than upon the servile principle of fear. Methods of severity ought only to be employed against obstinate perverseness and depravity ; instances of which, it is hoped, do not frequently occur. The principle of fear, when too strongly wrought upon in the minds of children, is apt, either to break the strength and resolution of their minds, and to produce a mean servility and cowardice in the future transactions of

† Eph. vi. 4.

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their life ; or it is ready to produce a secret hatred and aversion to the whole discipline and rules of a virtuous education ; and this will scarcely fail to break out to so much the greater extravagance, when the hated authority and influence is removed. Methods of severity, and the dread of punishment, are *then* only to be employed, when all the softer arts of gentleness and love are found to be too weak. They are like those violent and extraordinary medicines applied in cases of extraordinary danger, which, although they may, in some instances, produce a temporary cure, yet seldom fail, at the same time, to produce such a weakness in the constitution, as impairs the principles of life, and enfeebles all its future functions.

3dly, Another important direction is, that the parental authority be exerted only against undoubted instances of wickedness and folly. If parents take into the plan of their instructions, the suggestions of a weak superstitious credulity, or the

uncertain and disputable peculiarities of party-zeal, if such things are inculcated on the minds of children, with the same solemnity and zeal, as the most unquestionable and important duties of a virtuous life ; or, if by authority, children are equally restrained from what is innocent and harmless, as from the most pernicious instances of immorality ; the consequence is likely to be very fatal. Children instructed in this manner, when they come to the full exercise of understanding, and to judge with freedom for themselves, and thus come to perceive the groundlessness of what they had been taught, with the most solemn airs of wisdom and authority, will be tempted rashly to despise the whole plan of a virtuous education, as built upon the same credulous and weak foundation. There is reason to apprehend, that as by too much indulgence, a sufficient check oftentimes has not been given to the hurtful folly and extravagance of children ; so by too severe and superstitious restraints,

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their uncautious minds have been tempted to break through the most sacred and important ties. While therefore we are careful to omit nothing in the plan of our instructions and authority that is of importance to the virtue and happiness of children, we should be equally careful to exclude whatever is not necessary or conducive to this important end ; and therefore, to allow them every innocent and harmless liberty.

The second thing proposed to be considered, was the importance of the duty recommended in the text, and the arguments by which it is to be enforced. This shall be the subject of another discourse. At present, I conclude with the following remark ; that the training of a *child in the way he should go*, is a matter that deserves a greater share of attention and concern than is usually bestowed. In the ordinary plans of education, how much assiduity and attention is employed to form the understanding and manners of a child, so as that he may afterwards appear with advantage

in society, and be able to procure the interests and honours of this world. This branch of education is, no doubt, of great and indispensable importance. But is it not of superior importance, to plant, with equal assiduity and care, the knowledge of religion and the principles of virtue in his mind ; and so to form his manners, as that he shall afterwards appear with honour and advantage, not only in the sight of men, but in the eye of God ; and be fitted to perform the part which is incumbent on him, as a subject of his moral kingdom, and the expectant of a blessed immortality, as the disciple of Jesus Christ. Without this, children are considered only in the light of their connexion with this present world, whilst their connexion with their Maker, on whom they constantly depend, with a future judgment, and with those eternal interests which are then to be determined according to their conduct in this world, are neglected and forgot.

DISCOURSE XIX.

On Religious Education.

PROV. xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go.

IN a former discourse, I endeavoured to explain the duty recommended in the text: I now proceed to consider the importance of it, and the arguments by which it ought to be enforced.

The exhortation given in the text, is to be considered as addressed to every man, to whom Providence has given any degree of influence over the minds of children; but in a special manner, as addressed to parents, to whom Providence has given

the most natural and powerful influence; and who, by many peculiar ties, are bound to the observation of this duty. To this purpose, let us first consider, (what ought indeed to be considered as the basis and support of every duty to which we are called in the course of Providence) the regard we owe to the will of God, and the account which we must render unto him of our conduct in this matter. The general principles of all religion, and the special ties of Christianity, point out in the strongest manner, how much it is the will of God, that parents should train up their children *in the way they should go*. On the general principles of all religion; that there is a God, and a moral Providence above us, that we are now under his omniscient eye, acting our several parts, in a state of trial and probation, in order to receive *according to our works*; from these great principles we must conclude, that no part of a man's behaviour in this world will fall
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more immediately under the divine inspection and review, nor have a greater influence in determining his future state of happiness or misery, than the observation or neglect of this important duty. *That* distinguishing mark of approbation, which was given by the Almighty to Abraham, the father of the faithful, seems to point out this inspection as a capital part of the divine administration of this world: * *Abraham shall surely become a mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham, that which he hath spoken of him.* These words seem evidently to signify, that God, in viewing and judging of the character of Abraham, had a principal regard to his conduct towards his family and children; and that finding he would

* Gen. xviii. 18.

acquit himself in this respect with integrity and piety, he made it one of the grounds on which he was determined to bestow the blessings he had promised to his family; and on account of which he is so honourably distinguished in the sacred records, as *the Friend of God*.

But not only the general principles of all religion point out the obligations that parents are under to this duty, but there is a very special and solemn obligation lying upon *Christian* parents. This duty does not stand merely upon the footing upon which all the other duties of religion stand, viz. the precept of divine authority; but to this duty they are bound in a very particular and special manner, by the ordinance of baptism, to which children are presented by their parents. With what design are children presented to this sacred institution? It is not surely meant, that the sprinkling of water on an infant's face, and the naming over him the name of God, can be of itself

itself of any great avail. No; one great design of it, at least, is to bring the parents under the most solemn tie to educate their children as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; to form their tender minds on the principles and motives of the Christian religion; and thus to train them up in *the way they should go*. It is to give to the original ties of conscience and humanity, the additional and solemn tie of their own promissory vow, made in the venerable name of God, in which they were themselves baptized. Was the Christian baptism regarded in this light; in this view of it, did parents shew as great solicitude to answer the solemn obligations which it brings them under, as to have the sacred rite itself performed, it would have great and durable effects in the Christian church. But by the cursory manner in which it is observed, by the inattention and indifference of parents, in the religious education of their children after they are baptized: the effects
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of it are but rarely to be seen in the church of Christ.

2d, For the further illustration of the subject, let us consider the importance of the duty recommended in the text, to the welfare of society. The influence of parents, in training up children in *the way they should go*, is one of the most useful and important spheres of life. There are few things whereby a man can be of greater advantage, or disadvantage to society, than by the observation or neglect of this important duty. If sobriety, and purity of manners, is ever to prevail in the larger communities of men, it must be founded on the good order and sobriety of families; and take its rise from the religious education and examples of domestic life. Until the principles of piety and virtue are sown and cultivated in the minds of children, by a virtuous education, every other mean of public reformation, is but damming up the streams, whilst the springs from which they
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flow are kept open and supplied. And was this influence of parents suitably directed, and carefully employed, very great effects might be expected from it: first, from the greater aptitude of children to receive the impressions of religious wisdom in their earlier years, than in any future period of life: Secondly, From that peculiar influence which parents naturally have over the sentiments and manners of their children: And, lastly, From the blessing of almighty God, on such an excellent and laudable employment. Hence the conduct of Abraham, in the religious instruction of his household and children, is described as successful in accomplishing the useful purpose for which it was employed; * *They shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.* Hence also in the sequel of the text, *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.* These expressions evidently signify, that by the religious education of children,

• Gen. xviii. 19.

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we are likely to produce such impressions on their hearts, as will have a salutary and a lasting influence on the whole of their future conduct. If accordingly, we inquire into the causes of the prevalence of immorality, in the present, or in any former age, we shall probably perceive that a principal one, is the neglect of religious education, or the wrong direction of it. If then we would wish to do the most important service to society, and leave some traces of our usefulness behind us, we will *train up our children and dependants in the way they should go.*

3d, For the farther illustration of the subject, let us consider, how much that parental affection and concern for the happiness of children, which Nature, as well as Religion and Christianity, has instructed us to feel, obliges parents to the observation of this duty. If they wish to see their children happy, can this dictate of humanity be more effectually gratified, than

than by *training them up in the way they should go*? To set this matter in its full light, I would request your attention to the following observations.

1st, That by training up children *in the way they should go*, we are likely to convey to them the most important blessings which it is in the power of a parent to bestow upon his children.

2dly, That unless this duty is performed with proper care, children run the greatest risk, not only of losing these important blessings, but of being involved in opposite unhappiness and misery.

3dly, That if children are not *trained up in the way they should go*, all the other advantages of life which are put into their hands, will only prove the means of more extensive corruption and unhappiness.

1st, By training up children in the way they should go, their parents are likely to transmit to them the most important blessings which it is possible for a parent to bestow

bestow upon his children : they shall thereby lead them to that course of life, which by the constitution of their nature and the appointment of their Maker, can be the only solid and durable foundation of their happiness in all the future periods of their being. That piety and virtue, although we should view it only in its natural and immediate effects, in *that* self-approbation and tranquillity, and in *that* social enjoyment and esteem which it procures, is of principal importance to the happiness of life, may, on calm attention, appear visible to the weakest eye. As the wise man has elegantly expressed it ; * *happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies ; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her.*

* Prov. iii. 13.

right hand, and in her left hand, riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

Added to the natural and immediate advantages of a virtuous life, of how much greater importance is it to be deemed, when it is considered as the law of God, and the requisite foundation of his favour and regard? And what a powerful motive is, in this view of it, suggested to the minds of parents, to bend their chief attention and endeavours here, in the education of their children? Let an affectionate parent ask himself, were he just now to leave the world, and to leave his children after him, whether he would spend his last and dying moments, (was the fate of his children to depend on it) in wishing they might live in opulence and pleasure, joined with wickedness and guilt, or in obscurity and poverty, with piety and virtue; that his beloved child should be, indeed, a wealthy man, and live amidst the gaieties and splen-

splendours of the world, but an impious, a debauched and wicked man, a contemner of religion and of God ; or that he should be poor, and perhaps despised, but a pious, an upright and worthy man, a worshipper and friend of God, temperate and holy in his life, beloved and valued by his friends, contented and satisfied within himself ! If no wise parent would hesitate a moment in the choice, should he hesitate a moment in determining where he ought to employ his chief attention and concern in the education of his children ?

Parents labour with amazing assiduity to accumulate the riches, and to procure the preferments of this world, for their children. Should they not consider what share of their labour ought to be employed in the religious cultivation and improvement of their hearts ; and how much more effectually they might, by this means, provide for their future happiness, than by procuring for them the transitory, and oftentimes

oftentimes destructive interests and pleasures of the world; by teaching them, in the language of the wise author of this book of proverbs, † *how much better it is to get wisdom than gold; and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!*

2dly, Let it be observed, that unless the duty recommended in the text, is performed with proper care, children run the greatest risk, not only of losing the important advantages, meant to be conveyed by a virtuous education, but of being involved in opposite unhappiness and misery. Children come into the world totally unqualified, either for discharging the proper offices of life, or enjoying the happiness it is capable of affording them. In this respect, the human nature is a more feeble and imperfect thing than even the brutal nature, which soon arrives at the small degree of improvement of which it is

† Prov. xv. 16.

susceptible, and then desists from further progress. The mind of man, in the first period of its existence in this world, is not unlike to the outlines of a picture lightly sketched, which care and pains must afterwards colour and complete. Hence it lies exposed to the opposite impressions of wisdom or folly, of innocence or guilt, from the education and examples which it meets with in its earlier years. Nay, if this education, and these examples, are not of the virtuous kind, and adhibited with care, the young, uncautious, and unjudging mind, (without an extraordinary protection from divine Providence and grace) will soon be immersed in wickedness and misery.

The human nature is not only weak and helpless, at its first appearance in this world, but it has received a mighty shock by man's apostacy from God; and very early marks of the disorder which proceeds from this apostacy, appear in the minds of children;

children; as Solomon hath expressed it,
* *foolishness is bound in the heart of a child.*
And ought not this to be a powerful argument with an affectionate and loving parent, to labour with so much the greater care for the virtue and the welfare of his child. He has been the instrument of bringing him into the world under this fatal disadvantage, which, without a very assiduous and early caution aided by the grace of Heaven, will soon bring forth the bitter fruits of guilt and misery. Having brought them into the world under this peculiar disadvantage, it is but common justice and humanity to do what he can to help them safely out of it. And it will be found, that his doing this, will require all the care and pains he can bestow. To form the principles of piety and virtue in the hearts of children, is a very delicate and difficult employment. It is like transplanting from a warm to a cold and barren

* Prov. xxiii. 15.

soil, those delicate and tender plants which cannot be preserved or nourished to maturity, but by uncommon art and care.

This fatal disadvantage is mightily increased by the state and circumstances of the world into which they are to go. Alas ! they are to go into a world where snares lie thick on every side, and poisoned arrows, aimed at the destruction of their virtue, fly from every quarter ; and which (God knows) without the strongest guards of a virtuous education, and the stronger guard of his almighty grace, they are little able, and less willing, to resist. Notwithstanding, therefore, all the imagined fondness and affection of parents for their children, there cannot be a more merciless and inhuman thing, than to send them out into the world unprepared against the dangerous and fatal snares to which their innocence and happiness are soon to be exposed. They are to go upon a difficult and important voyage, wherein many hazards must be

run,

run, and much skill is requisite, to pilot them with safety in their progress. If they go upon it ignorant and unprepared, they will probably sink themselves, ere long, into bottomless perdition.

3dly, Observe, that if children are not trained up in the way they should go, all other advantages of life which are put into their hands, will only prove the means of more extensive corruption and unhappiness; they will heighten and inflame the innate corruption of the heart, and give the more unbounded scope to their licentiousness and folly. Happy had it been for many children, to have been educated in a virtuous and honest poverty, and thus, from necessity, inured to a virtuous and honest industry, instead of being furnished, by the ill-directed industry and labour of their parents, with the means and the motives to idleness, dissipation, and debauchery!

In the graver and more thoughtful periods of life, we are ready to complain of the folly and licentiousness of earlier years. Let it be considered, how far parents may have contributed to what they now complain of and lament, by the neglect of that religious education they should have given their children, whilst their minds were, as yet, untainted by the world, and more open to the impressions of religious wisdom. If children shall observe, in the conversation and example of their parents, a perpetual keen attention to accumulate the riches of this world, without an equal care to form the principles of piety and virtue in their hearts; what can be expected as the consequence of this? Are they not, by their example, leading them, either on the one hand, to a low, sordid, and penurious avarice; or, if their ungainly lessons of selfishness and avarice lose their influence, are they not leading them
to

to just the opposite extreme? By giving them the prospect of future lazy opulence and luxury, are they not quenching in them all desire of every valuable improvement, and preparing for them the means of gratifying every dissolute and licentious inclination?

I only add one consideration more, than which I can conceive nothing stronger on the subject. Let it be supposed, (although it be beyond expression mournful to make the supposition) that at the final judgment of the world, our children are to be condemned amongst the workers of iniquity, and that their condemnation is to be, in part, the consequence of our neglect, and therefore put to our account: suppose the righteous judge of all were to condemn us, not only as the guilty authors of our own, but of the condemnation of our children: suppose, that added to the sentence of the judge, we were to hear the doleful cries and lamentations of our miserable children,

upbraiding their unnatural and guilty parents, as the authors of their misery ; and is it possible for the heart of man to figure to itself a more tremendous interview ? But to this every parent stands exposed, who does not, with the utmost care, *train up his children in the way they should go* : On the other hand, is it possible to conceive, that such a joyful circumstance can ever happen in the course of his existence, than to stand applauded at the final judgment of the world, as having trained up *his children in the way they should go*, and in consequence of this, to be conducted along with them by the Judge and Saviour of the world, into the everlasting kingdom of their heavenly Father ?

The sum of what has been delivered on the subject is, that nature as well as religion teaches parents, in the strongest manner, to desire and provide for the welfare of their children ; and *he* must be a monster in his kind who is not thus disposed.

But

But in acting from this dictate of their nature, they ought to take it calmly and seriously into their thoughts, in what way, and by what plan of industry, in their behalf, they are most likely to promote their future welfare, either in this world or in that which is to come; and on this inquiry they will certainly perceive, that the first and highest object of their care should be *to train them up*, by their religious instructions, example and authority, *in the way they should go*.

I have gone through the several particulars proposed to be considered in discoursing on the subject of the text. The importance of the subject will, I hope, justify the earnestness with which the above particulars have been recommended to your thoughts. This indeed is a matter of such consequence, that if a sense of God, and the impressions of religion, are to leave the world, and die with the present age, or if they are to be preserved
and

and transmitted to a succeeding age, it will be chiefly owing to the neglect or observation of this duty.

It might be proper to conclude this discourse with some address to those who are yet in the earlier period of life, for whose benefit the direction of the text is given. At present, I have time only to offer a single word of exhortation. If God has blessed you with religious and virtuous parents, who employ their time and care, not only to promote your interest and comfort in this present world, but under a still nobler direction of paternal tenderness, are labouring to plant those sentiments of piety and virtue in your breasts, which will be the seeds of everlasting happiness and joy, when all the interests and comforts of this world are gone : O, learn to value and improve this inestimable gift ; praise the goodness of your Maker in bestowing it. Next to his having sent his Son from heaven to redeem your souls, it

is the most precious blessing of his goodness. Open therefore your understandings and your hearts to the instructions which they give, and follow their example in the way that leads to everlasting life. By the good education they have given you, they have laid the foundation of a virtuous and happy life ; you yourself, by the help of God, must raise the superstructure. Receive then, and cultivate with care, that remembrance and sense of your Creator in the days of youth, which they have been endeavouring to establish in your hearts, and be assured, this will be the source of the truest honour and enjoyment in this world, and of a glorious immortality with God in heaven. * *Hear then, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.—Get wisdom, get understanding ; forget it not, neither decline from the words of her mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall*

* Prov. iv. 1.

preserve

*preserve thee : love her and she shall keep thee.
Exalt her and she shall promote thee : she
shall bring thee to honour when thou dost em-
brace her. She shall give to thine head an
ornament of grace ; a crown of glory shall she
deliver to thee.*

DISCOURSE XX.

The Character and Obligations of a
Minister of the Gospel.

[Preached at the Admission of the Reverend
Mr. GEORGE BANNATINE to be Mi-
nister of the Wynd-Church of Glasgow.]

MATTHEW v. 13.

Ye are the Salt of the Earth.

IT is generally understood, that when our blessed Saviour addressed these words to his disciples, he considered them chiefly in that public character in which they were to be employed, as the teachers of his religion. Salt is of a purifying nature, and the preservative from putrefaction; and they, as the publishers and preachers of the gospel, were to purify the minds of men, and preserve their morals from corruption.

It

It is probable our Saviour referred to two things in this comparison; first, to the nature and influence of their instructions; and, secondly, to that of their example; and meant to signify, that it behoved each of these to be of a salutary, purifying nature. As the particular consideration of each of these might lead me to exceed the proper bounds of this discourse, I have therefore proposed to confine myself chiefly to the last of them; which, indeed, I take to be the principal thing intended by our Saviour, from a similar expression in St. Mark †, where speaking of the practical impressions of the gospel on the minds of men, he says to his disciples, *Have salt in yourselves.*

In the following discourse, I shall therefore endeavour, by divine assistance, in the first place, to state what we are to understand by being the salt of the earth, when this expression is considered as referring to

† Mark ix. 50.

the nature and influence of a minister's example. 2d, The importance of his being qualified, in this sense of the expression, for the duties of his ministry.

In discoursing on these particulars, I am sensible, that in a different situation, it would be much more becoming me, and what I would much rather chuse, to hear and learn my duty from the reverend fathers and brethren who are here present, than to pretend to teach them theirs: it is only to perform the part, which arises from the province, now assigned me, that I would, with all humility, lay before them that idea of the character, and obligations, of a minister, which I wish, however defective or faulty, to inculcate on myself.

The first thing proposed, was to state, what we are to understand by being the salt of the earth, when the expression is considered as referring to the nature and influence of a minister's example. This I shall do in a few words.

First,

First, It signifies, that his conduct, in the sight of men, be directed by the laws of that religion which he preaches to the world; that there, nothing be observed which tends to raise a suspicion in the minds of men, that himself is not convinced of their authority, or directed by their influence. This is the first, and the most obvious thing, denoted by our Saviour's expression in the text; without which, a minister must, at once, destroy his usefulness, and, in the words of the text, the salt must lose its savour. But this is not the whole. For,

2dly, The expression signifies, that the secret springs and motives of his conduct be directed also by the gospel; and that the outward regularity and virtue of his life, be the natural expression of the sentiments and temper of his heart. There are two different characters sustained by every man: 1st, The character which he has with men, and the reputation which is
given

given him by the world. 2d, The character which he has with God, and the place which he holds in his esteem. The first of these arises from his visible deportment in society; the second, not from that alone, but from that in its connexion with the principles and dispositions of his heart. This distinction runs through the whole of sacred scripture. It is expressly made by the apostle to the Romans; * *He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, whose praise is not of men, but of God.* Now each of these was, no doubt, intended by our Saviour in this denomination, *Ye are the salt of the earth.* His gospel is evidently designed to purify the dispositions of the heart of man, as well as to direct the measures of his life: with no propriety, therefore, could he say to his disciples, *Ye are the salt of the earth,* without including each of these in the sense of this expression.

* Rom. ii. 28.

In order then, to be the salt of the earth, a minister must feel the power of that internal piety, which the gospel was intended, and is fitted to produce in the heart of every man by whom it is believed; and from thence exhibit to the world, the example of a virtuous and holy life. This internal piety must spread its influence into the whole of his deportment, but in a more especial manner into the sacred and peculiar functions of his ministry. In these he ought to be awakened to an affectionate and feeling sense of sacred things, and be conscious of that influence in himself, which it is the purpose of his several ministrations to promote in the minds of men. When, for instance, he conducts the worship of a Christian assembly, and expresses, in their name, that homage of the heart, with which they ought to worship God, he ought then to feel the power of that internal homage in himself, and speak only what proceeds from the genuine impressions

sions of his own heart.—When preaching to a Christian assembly, he would lead his hearers to a suitable idea, and impression, of eternal things, he should then be filled, himself, with the heavenly impression, and draw from thence the descriptions and enforcements which he sets before them. In a word, in every sacred ministration, in which he is employed, he must study to become, in the real sentiments and dispositions of his heart, and in the eye of God, who sees the heart, what he outwardly appears to be, what he wishes to be reputed in the public eye, and what it is the professed intention of his sacred ministrations to promote among mankind. To be thus directed and disposed, in the duties of the ministry, is, I apprehend, the proper and full signification of our Saviour's expression, *Ye are the salt of the earth.*

The second thing, which was proposed to be considered, is the importance of a minister's being qualified, in this sense of

the expression, for the office of the ministry. I shall consider this importance in three different lights: 1st, In point of duty and sincerity. 2d, In the view of its utility and advantage to the world. And, 3d, In the view of that comfort and advantage, which will arise from it to the minister himself.

1st, Let us consider the importance of a minister's being *the salt of the earth*, in the sense just now explained, in point of duty and sincerity.—It is easy to observe, that, besides the general obligations of religion and morality incumbent upon every man, there are special obligations, which arise from men's particular professions in society; that their acting suitably to these, principally constitutes that virtue and propriety of life, which is generally marked with honour and esteem; and that their departing from, or violating these, creates an opposite deformity, which is as generally marked with dishonour and contempt.

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It is easy, likewise, to observe, that in the particular profession of a minister, that internal piety, which the gospel was intended to promote, is essential to the propriety and virtue of his character. By the nature of his office, he must assume the outward form of piety; nay, he must assume it often, in the immediate presence of his Maker, and, with an air of importance and solemnity, express before him the effusions of a heart devoted to his service. If, nevertheless, there is nothing corresponding to this outward form, in the real state and temper of his soul, a greater impropriety in manners cannot be conceived. It is more than impropriety; it is falsehood and insincerity: for what can be a greater, or a more odious insincerity, than, with a serious and solemn air, to counterfeit a character, of which we are not really possessed, and that not only in the sight of men, but in the immediate eye of God; nay, under the disguise of an immediate

address to his adorable Majesty? This counterfeited character, withal, must be maintained through the daily business of life; whence it will be very difficult for such a man to preserve a suitable regard to candour and sincerity in any instance of his conduct.

The clergy have been long reproached, as apt to mingle a peculiar strain of slyness and hypocrisy in their conduct with the world. I hope the censure has been made much oftener, and with more severity, than they have deserved. But if at any time the censure has been just, what hath been observed, may lead us to a natural explanation of this peculiarity. A studied, and deliberate hypocrisy in the sacred functions of the ministry, *i. e.* in the most serious and solemn parts of human life, will insensibly root out every principle of candour from the heart, and, by a natural transition, mix itself in every other circumstance of life. It ought, however, to be remarked,

remarked, that this affords no just reflection against the ministerial profession, but against the man by whom it is abused: nay, he who is qualified in the manner above described, will, from that unseen and accurate sincerity, which he studies to observe in the functions of his ministry, natively improve his sense of candour and sincerity in every other action of his life. While, therefore, the dishonest clergyman is, indeed, the likeliest of all other men, to become thoroughly acquainted with the arts of imposture and disguise; yet he, who is sincere in his profession, is as likely to become a man of the most delicate integrity in every part of life.

From these few remarks it may appear, how much, in point of duty and sincerity, the teacher of religion is obliged to be *the salt of the earth*, in the sense above explained. If this is not his real character, he does not only act an inconsistent and improper part, but is truly, in the sight of
P 4 God,

God, an insincere and worthless hypocrite: and could he candidly reflect upon his conduct, would see himself in the same contemptible and odious light. On this account, our Saviour, in the sequel of the text, so strongly marks his insignificance and worthlessness, *If the salt has lost its savour it is good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men.*

2dly, I am, in the next place, to represent the importance of the character above described, in the view of its advantage to the world. This is to be considered as the principal thing intended by our Saviour in the text; for when he calls the teachers of religion *the salt of the earth*, he meant chiefly to represent their useful influence upon the world.—What I have to offer upon this head, shall be digested under the three following particulars. 1. A minister's being qualified in the manner above described, is what alone will enable him to give a suitable example to the world. 2. It will

will prompt him to exert himself, and the talents God has given him, to the best advantage in his power, for answering the ends of his profession. 3. It will give him a peculiar talent of instruction, of great importance to the success of his ministry, and of which he cannot be otherwise possessed.

First, A minister's being qualified and disposed in the manner above described, is what alone will enable him to give a suitable example to the world. Here, the general observation will occur to every man, That the good example of a minister is highly requisite, to add authority and weight to his instructions; and that an opposite example will not only weaken and destroy this authority, but, in the thoughts of many, will furnish an apology, and give a kind of opposite authority to wickedness. The undistinguishing, which is by far the greatest part of mankind, will be hereby tempted to believe that religion is nothing at the bottom but a fabulous imposture,

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or, at best, an agreeable and specious theory, fit for the teachers of religion to display, but unfit for the business and practice of the world.

But, besides this general and obvious remark, what I would chiefly observe on this head, (and it falls particularly within the subject of my discourse) is this; that the good example of a minister, which is fitted to give weight to his instructions, must immediately proceed from the piety and goodness of his heart, and be the natural expression of what he feels, and is conscious of, within himself. Like the good man whom our Saviour describes, *he must bring forth his good things from the good treasure of his heart.* From prudence, or a sense of decency, a minister may so adjust the measures of his conduct, and guard all appearances before the world, as to be exempted from reproach, and avoid the danger of corrupting others by the force of his example. This, however, is far short
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of what is requisite, not only in point of candour and sincerity, but in point of usefulness, and in order to promote the ends of his profession.

There is a peculiar degree of abstraction from the vanities and vices of the world, and a peculiar pitch of eminence in the virtues of the Christian life, which is expected by the world, and seems indeed to be implied in the profession of a minister. That sacred leisure and exemption which it gives from the cares and dissipations of the world, that habitual attention which it calls upon him to bestow on spiritual and heavenly things, ought natively to raise him to this peculiar excellence; and the clergy, to do justice to society, should labour to acquire, not only a superior knowledge of religious truth, but a superior experience of its purifying power upon their hearts, and from thence assist the rest of mankind to surmount those opposite impressions from the world, to which they
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are laid open, from their different situation. In no other way, however, can such a distinguished excellence and virtue be expressed in a minister's example, but by his being qualified for the duties of his function, in the manner above described. Prudence, or attention to the opinion of the world, may lead a man to imitate this character, but the copy will be easily distinguished from the true original, by every discerning eye. Those artificial and affected principles will either leave the man, by whom they are assumed, in a state of spiritless indifference, or they will betray him into an unnatural ostentation and excess. There is always something natural and open in the conduct of an honest man, and a freedom and simplicity in his manners, which cannot be expressed, but when it comes immediately and freely from the heart.

This, now, is the example which a minister is called to set before the world, and by which he is to season and support the
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instructions which he gives : and this, indeed, will give them a peculiar authority. Religion, when exhibited in real life, without affectation and formality, especially in trying and difficult occasions, will give the world an idea and conviction of its excellence, which no description can attain ; without which the most accurate description will appear no more than a display of ingenuity and art ; and the minister himself, a performer on the public stage, for his own reputation or advantage.

To the above remarks it may be added, that a good example, in the conduct of a minister, is likely to be accompanied with some particular advantages. From observation of the world, we shall find that in all the different societies, in which men are closely linked together, there is usually some leading influence which forms the taste of the society, and gives it its peculiar character. This influence is usually acquired by means of some distinguishing
station

station and ability. The station of a minister, and those offices of life in which, by his profession, he is called to be employed, naturally tend to give him such an influence in that religious society to which the providence of God hath immediately connected him. As our Saviour expresses it, *He is as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid.* He acts his part under the inspection of the public eye, therefore his example is likely to have the more extensive influence: and, corrupted as the world is, there is still something respectable in the station of a minister. If it is filled by him in a worthy manner, and with proper dignity and wisdom, it will hardly fail to command, at least, a secret veneration and respect, and to give him a peculiar direction of the sentiments and manners of the people committed to his charge.

2d, It was observed, that a minister's being qualified, in the manner above described,

ed, will prompt him to exert himself, and employ the talents God has given him, to the best advantage in his power, for answering the ends of his profession. There is a certain point of perfection in every business of life to which every man, who acts in the genuine spirit of his profession, will endeavour to attain. Though the faithful minister of Christ puts no confidence in himself, or in any little abilities or improvements of his own, knowing that the success of all his labours must depend on God, yet from the nature of his profession, he knows it is his duty to perform the part which is assigned him in the perfectest manner that he can, and in this way to rely on the assistance which is promised in the gospel. In every sacred ministration, in which the teacher of religion is called to be employed, there is undoubtedly a certain method of performing it, which is the best and most conducive to the end for which it was designed. In every

every religious instruction he is called to give, there is a certain point of light in which it should be placed, in order to do justice to it, and to convey it with the best advantage to the view and apprehension of his people; as there must be a certain method of addressing it by which it is likeliest to reach their hearts. There is withal, among the various topics of religion suggested in the gospel, a certain selection to be made, from time to time, which is best adapted to the circumstances of the people to whom they are addressed, and which, in their particular situation, is likeliest to be accompanied with suitable effects. The judgment and ability of doing all this, is, I apprehend, the peculiar art of a minister's profession, and a principal part of that wisdom of which the scriptures speak, by which *he winneth souls*. To arrive at this peculiar wisdom and ability, the faithful minister of Christ will dedicate the labour of his
life,

life, and exert every talent God has given him to the utmost of his power. To this he will feel himself obliged, that he may do justice to the character and commission which he bears to that divine religion which he preaches to the world, and to the souls of men who are committed to his care. He sees that the ends of his profession are of infinite importance to the happiness of men ; for they are no less than *to bring them from darkness unto light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among the saints, by the faith that is in Jesus Christ.* The feelings of humanity, cherished by the sense of his religion, will deeply interest him in the accomplishment of these designs ; and it would give him a singular affliction to believe, that these were obstructed in his hands by any criminal omission, or misconduct of his own.

Animated by the same great idea of the ends of his profession, he will reckon it his duty to cultivate the faculties which God has given him, and to be every day adding to the improvements he has made as a teacher of the gospel. He will hate a life of ignorance and sloth ; and retreat, as much as decently he can, from that insipid waste of time, in the frivolous conversation and amusements of the world, which are a hindrance to every valuable improvement. New fields of knowledge, essential to the sacred character, or conducive to its usefulness and dignity, will be ever opening to his view. Though he knows that the gracious influence of God alone can reach the consciences or change the hearts of men ; yet he also knows, that those peculiar qualifications which belong to his profession, are, in their nature, fitted to accomplish these designs, and that a minister is then likeliest to obtain this gracious

cious influence from God, when, with a humble dependance on it, he exerts and cultivates the talents God has given him to the utmost of his power; relying therefore upon God, it is the business and the pleasure of his life to be adding every day to his improvements. The exhortation which the apostle gives to Timothy, he takes continually to himself, † *Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all.*

He will withal perceive, that, to answer the ends of his profession, an equal share of preparation and improvement may be requisite in every situation in which a minister is placed, and in preaching even to the lowest and the least discerning part of mankind. Was the sole end of a minister's profession to acquit himself to the approbation and the liking of his people, to gratify their taste, or to raise some temporary emotions in their minds; to all this,

† 1 Tim. iv. 15.

in many situations, very small improvements might suffice ; nay, oftentimes the meanest talents, and the most insipid and absurd performances, are, in this way, able to procure the highest popularity. But it is a different thing to persuade our people to resist their sinful passions, and amend the evil of their ways, *to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* Though no man is of himself *sufficient for these things*, yet it is allowed by all, that there are certain qualifications and improvements belonging to the profession of a minister, by which he is prepared to be the instrument of God in promoting these designs : and, if this is owned, it will perhaps be found to be a consequence, that, in order to promote them, an equal share of these qualifications may be requisite in addressing the hearts of men, in every rank of life ; for in this way it will be found, that their hearts are equally shut against the efficacy
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of the gospel, and with equal difficulty brought into subjection and captivity to Jesus Christ. The conversion of a prince, or of a peasant, from their peculiar habits of iniquity, are, I believe, with equal difficulty to be atchieved.

It may be further added on this head, that a minister's being qualified, in the manner above described, will prompt him, with invariable constancy and fortitude, to declare unto his people the whole council of God. He will faithfully and fairly set before them the whole extent of their religious and moral obligations, and with all that minuteness and detail with which they are delivered in the sacred scriptures, and which he sees the circumstances of his people may require. No aversion which their ignorance, their prejudice, or sinful passions, may suggest on this account, no unpopular injurious epithets, that may be given him as a legal or a moral preacher, will prevail upon him either to conceal or

to disguise any part of that divine religion upon which, with the deepest earnestness, he founds the prospect of his own salvation. He will search, with all the diligence and candour that he can, the Holy Bible, look for genuine religion there, and from thence, rather than from any human system upon earth, learn what he is to teach as a minister of Christ.

3d, It was observed on this head, that being the salt of the earth, in the sense formerly explained, will not only prompt a minister to exert the talents God has given him, to the best advantage in his power, for answering the ends of his profession, but will give him a peculiar talent of instruction, of great importance to the success of his ministry, of which he cannot be otherwise possessed. The great objects of religion, which the apostle calls *the things of God*, cannot be perceived in their proper light; their dignity, importance and extent, cannot be perceived but
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by him who is upright and pure in heart. *The natural man receives them not, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* Hence it is, that moral and religious obligations, and the laws of Christian piety and virtue, when explained in their genuine and full extent, are usually regarded by the vicious part of mankind as empty fictions, which exist only in the fancy of recluse and visionary men; and all pretensions to that piety and goodness which the gospel hath prescribed, are treated by them either as delusion or hypocrisy.

To this it was owing, that the Pharisees, † *who were covetous*, derided the instructions of our Saviour, on the love of God and the contempt of this present world. The sentiments which he expressed, being totally above the comprehension of their covetous and selfish minds, and to which they felt nothing correspondent

† Luke xvi. 14.

in themselves, were, therefore, treated by them as ridiculous and fanciful. To this also it was owing, that the piety and purity of life which the apostles taught the Gentile world, and supported by the doctrine of a crucified Redeemer, was rejected by the Greeks, at that time the most enlightened nation upon earth, as absurdity and foolishness. The apostle Paul gives this account of it. * *If the gospel, says he, be hid; if its wisdom, its importance, and excellence be hid, it is hid to them whose minds the God of this world hath blinded, whose moral and religious sense of things has been darkened and debased by the impressions of this world.*

If this now be a just representation of the matter, the inference is obvious, that a teacher of religion, who has no experience of its purifying power upon himself, is not in possession of that peculiar talent of instruction which belongs to his

* 2 Cor. iv. 3.

profession. Religion has not yet appeared to him in that light in which it is perceived when it makes its way into the heart of man. In the language of the apostle ;
* *God has not shined into his heart to give him the light of the knowledge of his glory.* Being destitute of this peculiar light, when he attempts to represent *the things of God*, he must do it from a light and knowledge which is not his own ; like a man who never saw, when, by the force of imitation, he describes the visible creation without any just ideas of the things which he describes.

Was religion nothing more than a theory of speculative truth, to be seated in the heads of men, the moral and religious dispositions of its teachers would not be of so much consequence. But the religion which a minister is called to teach, is a practical and moral thing, the intention of which is to purify the heart of man ; and,

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

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therefore, cannot be fully understood and taught but by what the apostle calls the spiritual discernment, or by that light of understanding which is directed by the sentiments of a devout and honest heart. An accurate and extensive knowledge of the evidence and doctrines of religion, and a regular education, in various important parts of human learning, are indeed indispensably required, but not alone sufficient to qualify the teacher of religion.—In the fine arts, it is not by studied rules, or by critical remarks, at least it is not by these alone, that one is qualified to perceive their peculiar excellence, or to feel those delicate enjoyments they are fitted to communicate. To the knowledge of the rules of art, there must be joined that internal sense of beauty which is called a taste, and that peculiar sensibility which is originally planted by the Author of our nature, and is cultivated by acquaintance with the best exam-

examples of the kind. Thus too it is in the holy and divine art of life itself.

To all which it is to be added, that this internal preparation of the heart is what alone will enable the teacher of religion to attain that natural, simple, and persuasive eloquence, with which the gospel should be taught. In every kind of composition, or discourse, genuine and real eloquence is the language of the heart, or the natural expression of those sentiments, and feelings, which the subject, on which it is employed, is fitted to inspire; and the immediate effect of it is to leave the minds of those, to whom it is addressed, filled with that same idea and impression, which the author had conceived and felt within himself. Hence it follows, that the great objects of religion must be previously seen and felt, in their genuine dignity and moment, ere they can be represented with that natural and simple eloquence, which is fitted to enlighten and affect the heart.

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In this natural and interesting manner was the Christian religion first revealed. In the gospel, as it lies before us in the discourses of our blessed Lord, we meet with nothing of that laboured eloquence which is the mark of human art, and tends rather to excite a vain applause and admiration of the art itself, than a serious impression of the things themselves which it is designed to represent; nor do we find here, that laboured, artificial arrangement of speculative truths in which the wisdom and philosophy of man displays itself. Jesus was, in this respect, a singular instructor;—and it is not difficult to see the cause. He did not give his gospel to the world as a curiously investigated theory, the work of genius and art, but as a doctrine which he had from God, and which proceeded immediately from the dictates of that grace and truth with which he was inspired. The holy laws of life which he prescribed, the heavenly sentiments of wisdom which he studied

studied to imprint upon the hearts of men, he copied from the virtues of his own heart, as their purest and most beautiful originals.

On this account, a man of a discerning and unbiassed mind will be able to perceive a mighty difference betwixt the gospel, as it lies before us in its native and original simplicity, and those descriptions that are given of it in the laboured artificial forms into which it has been modelled by the hand of man; a difference not unlike to what is found in all the other works of God and man. The works of God are solemn and majestic, and by their inexpressible grandeur and simplicity, enlarge and elevate the heart. The works of men, though modelled by the nicest art and skill, are but little and diminutive, and, however they may amuse the fancy, seldom raise any great or elevating emotions in the heart. For this reason, it might at least deserve inquiry, if it would not better

ter serve the original intentions of the gospel to represent it to the world, as nearly as possible, in that artless and divine simplicity, in which it was delivered by its blessed Author, rather than as a laboured theory of speculative truths, curiously distinguished and arranged according to the rules of human art.

III.—It was proposed, in the last place, to consider the importance of a minister's being qualified for the duties of his office, in the manner above described, in the view of that comfort and advantage which it will afford himself. Having already taken up so much of your time, I shall not insist long on this particular.

The happiness of every situation arises chiefly from the hopes and projects which it opens to the minds of men. It is a constant succession and variety of these which constitutes the charm of human industry, in every sphere of life. But the teacher of religion, who is not governed by the
power

power of it himself, must be totally cut off from this fountain of enjoyment. The duties of his office must become a tedious and insipid round of insignificant employments, to which no animating hope or project is annexed, especially in a church, where there is so very little to favour the projects, either of ambition, or of avarice. To which it may be added, that in order to preserve the decorum of his character, he must often put himself to a painful and unnatural restraint, and be forced to a severity of manners, which he secretly contemns.

But he who is disposed, from the piety and goodness of his heart, to do the duties of his office, will draw from them the highest satisfaction and delight. They are immediately suited to the taste and temper of his mind, and suggest the most interesting and enlivening project upon earth; no less than that of being a fellow-worker with almighty God, and the blessed Jesus,
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in promoting the immortal happiness of men. Hence the apostle Paul expresses so much pleasure in the thought of discharging the commission which was given him; † *Nothing moves me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

I might further observe, that the temper and character, above described, will best enable a minister to overcome the difficulties and discouragements he may meet with in the course of his profession, or to bear them with tranquillity. Difficulties and discouragements, of various kinds, are scarcely to be avoided in the office of the ministry. Licentiousness and infidelity create aversion to the character, and dispose the vicious part of mankind to depreciate or oppose it. Unreasonable prejudices, likewise, may arise against a minister him-

† Acts xx. 24.

self,

self, from the ignorance and folly of his people. Nothing, however, like the character above described, will so effectually tend to soften and remove these prejudices, and change aversion into friendship and esteem; or if this cannot be done, as possibly may be the case, with some persons of a dark, sullen, and suspicious nature, or of a haughty unrelenting heart, yet, in spite of every prejudice, a noble tranquillity will be enjoyed by the faithful minister of Christ. The approbation of his own heart, a sense of merited esteem, and confidence in the Master whom he serves, will disarm the power of ignorance, of prejudice, and enmity, and give him an enjoyment of himself, which they will not be able to disturb. With the apostle Paul †, this is his rejoicing, *the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he has his conversation in the world.*

† 2 Cor. i. 12.

I might add on this head, that the preparation of the heart, above-described, is what alone will enable the minister of Christ to maintain a steadiness, and uniformity of conduct, in every circumstance of life, and in spite of every temptation that occurs. On the one hand, the patronage of men in power may tempt him to a servile complaisance, and to make an abject prostitution of his judgment to their influence; or, upon the other hand, to have the lead and acclamation of the multitude, and to be called of them Rabbi, like the Scribes of old; this may tempt him to a mean compliance with their favourite superstitions and absurdities. But the sincere and faithful minister of Christ, aided by the Master whom he serves, will feel an independency, and strength of mind, and a security of comfort from himself, that will render him superior to these temptations from the world. Guided by the dictates of an honest heart, he is there-

therefore uniform throughout, and consistent with himself in every part of life, While he gives no just occasion of complaint, he, nevertheless, in doing what his conscience, or his judgment have prescribed, is indifferent about the ignorant and uncharitable censures of the world, knowing, that if he sought to please men, at the expence of his integrity, *he should not be the servant of Jesus Christ.*

In the last place I might observe, what will readily occur to every one, that the sincere and faithful minister of Christ must feel a peculiar happiness and satisfaction in the duties of his ministry, from the prospect of that glorious reward which the Master, whom he serves, has promised to bestow upon his faithful servants; for he knows, * *that when the chief Shepherd shall appear, he shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

* 1 Pet. vi. 4.

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I have thus endeavoured to describe the importance of the character denoted by our Saviour's expression in the text; and shall conclude with this remark, That there is a special circumstance attending the profession of a minister, which adds greatly to the weight of his peculiar obligations; viz. that the same qualifications, which fit him for the duties of his office, will add to the goodness of his private character, and fit him for being a worthier and better man in every circumstance of life. In a different situation, a man may be distinguished in the sphere of his profession, while his character, in other circumstances of his life, is but indifferent. But, in order to be eminent and useful in the sacred character, a man must be eminently wise and virtuous in every instance of his conduct: and by the same means by which he studies to promote the everlasting interests of other men, he most effectually
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secures his own ; hence that important admonition, which the apostle gives to Timothy, † *Take heed unto thyself, and to thy doctrine, continue in them ; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.*

† 1 Tim. iv. 16.

[Faint, illegible text from bleed-through]

Yours truly,
J. M. Smith

T H E
C H A R G E
T O T H E
M I N I S T E R.

REV. SIR,
YOUR own knowledge and experience might excuse me from addressing you, in particular, on this occasion; nor shall I take upon me to offer any thing relating to the duties of your ministry in general. I only beg leave to suggest a few things with relation to the exercise of it, in the place where Providence has now fixed your lot, as I may, without presumption, be supposed to be

better acquainted with the circumstances of the ministry in this place, than it is possible for you to be.

Sir, In delivering the message of the gospel to this people, you will meet with a variety of characters, besides the general distinction, which every where obtains, between the righteous and the wicked. To men of every character and disposition, as far as you are able to mark them in the course of your experience, you will, no doubt, reckon it your duty to adapt the instructions of the gospel, so as to make them as useful as you can, to every one of them. I dare to say, your own experience has led you to observe, that general truths, wherein all are equally concerned, are not so apt to make impression on the minds of men; men admit them on a cursory undistinguishing view of their importance, but without drawing from them any proper consequences for their own instruction in particular; therefore, the more special your
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instructions are, provided they are not personal, or dictated by private passion, they will probably, by the divine blessing, be the usefuller. This, if I mistake it not, *is rightly to divide the word of truth, and to give to every one his portion of meat in due season.*

It is impossible for me, at present, to mention all the different characters which you will meet with in the course of your experience; and each of which may possibly require from you, a particular application and address. I shall only mention a few of the most obvious and leading ones, under which, by proper observation, all the rest may be comprised.

1st, You will meet with some who are totally indifferent about religion, and the gospel of the Son of God; and with some too, who under a pretence, though it be but a mere pretence of argument, will attempt to justify this conduct. In dealing with such persons, I would not advise you, without
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an evident necessity, in any case, and least of all when speaking from the pulpit, to enter into a learned metaphysical defence of the truth and authority of the gospel. It is not want of argument, or evidence, which is at the bottom of this character; but the want of seriousness and candour, with a concealed aversion to that purity of manners which the gospel has enjoined. To such persons, therefore, you will represent, in the clearest manner that you can, on the one hand, the reasonableness and wisdom, the dignity and comfort of a religious life, and the infinite importance of the motives by which it is supported in the gospel; and upon the other hand, the folly, the amazing folly of a wicked life; the dreadful hazard they must run, if that religion be the truth of God which they despise. Represent, withal, the desperate madness and depravity of treating the religion of the blessed Jesus with an affectation of indifference or contempt, while they

they have never seriously inquired either into the matters which it contains, or into the evidence on which it stands; and this you will find to be the case with the persons of whom I now speak. Prudent and affectionate representations of this nature, you will find to be the likeliest method of removing this affected ignorance and infidelity, and of pulling down those strong holds, and high imaginations, which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, and the obedience of Jesus Christ.

2d, You will meet with some who are not totally indifferent about religion; who would indeed be shocked to hear it openly contemned, who wish to be religious in their own esteem, and imagine they have such a share of piety as may secure acceptance with their Maker; but with whom you will meet with very superficial and imperfect views of its real nature and effects.—You know, Sir, and the reverend Fathers and Brethren, here present, know, that

that in the thoughts of superficial inattentive minds, religion is ready to receive a peculiar tincture from the taste and fashion of the times in which they live : that, by this influence, a shew of innocence is given to certain crimes which are, in themselves, of the most odious and hurtful kind ; and an apology is made for the neglect of certain duties, of the highest value and importance. Agreeably to this, you will meet with a religion modelled to the taste and fashion of the present age ; consisting chiefly in a freedom from notorious and grosser crimes, and an outward order and civility of manners ; but in which you will unhappily desiderate that exalted purity and piety of life, which the gospel hath enjoined.

To such persons you will reckon it your duty to set, in the clearest light you can, the whole extent and power of pure and undefiled religion, as recorded in the gospel ; to assure them it is something
more

more than a mere external decency of life, which may justify a man before the world : that it has a secret and unseen effect in purifying the heart of man, and in raising up the affections of his soul to God : that, in the language of the gospel, *it is a renovation of the spirit of the mind of man ; a walking with God ; a living by the faith of the Son of God ; and our being made partakers of the divine nature.* Having placed before their view this pure and perfect standard of the Christian life, in all its parts, and in all its elevation and extent, you will point out those criminal defects into which they are misled by the prevailing sentiments and custom of the times : assuring them withal that nothing but an habitual predominant endeavour, to arrive, as near as possible, to the perfect standard, will avail them in the sight of God, or create the evangelical sincerity, which he hath promised to accept for Jesus' sake. In this manner, Sir, you know our Saviour taught the age in
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which he lived, in his sermon * on the mount.

3d, You will meet with some who, in the language of the apostle James, seem to be religious, and indeed zealous for religion; and among these, I must, in charity, believe, many who are serious according to their views; but whose seriousness and zeal is, in many things, most unhappily misplaced: who, unfortunately for themselves, and as unfortunately for the world, employ the strongest efforts of their zeal about matters which have no connexion, or but a very remote connexion with the vital and substantial parts of true religion; who, eager about forms, are apt to let the power of godliness slip from under them; who, contending for the means, lose sight of the end itself; and, which is still a more deplorable mistake, are apt, without observing it, to mix a spirit of severity and pride, of calumny and wrath, and some of

* *Math. v. 20.*

the worst of human passions, with the efforts of their zeal.

To deal with persons of this character, you will find to be the most delicate and difficult part of your employment. Their hurtful passions and mistakes are not to be wrested from them by an open or untender violence. This will but rivet them the deeper in their bosoms ; and, though you may intend the kindest office in your power, you will, in this way, provoke their bitterness against yourself. It is here then, you will chiefly have occasion for the conduct of that wisdom which cometh from above, and of what the apostle, with so much beauty and significance, has called the meekness of wisdom.

But while you treat their errors and mistakes with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, you will treat them also with the candour and sincerity which becomes a minister of Christ, who, by *manifestation of the truth*, would commend himself

256 *The Charge to the Minister.*

to every man's conscience, in the sight of God. You will therefore candidly, though meekly, convince them, if you can, of their mistake.—You will endeavour to withdraw their misguided eagerness and zeal, from the shadow to the substance.—You will teach them to beware of resting in the means of religion, in place of the thing itself.—You will especially endeavour to convince them, that no end they may have in view, no cause in which they are embarked, how sacred soever it may seem to be, will ever justify unchristian means, or give either sanctity or innocence to the pride and wrath of man.—You will further represent, what I do in charity believe would have a mighty influence with some, could they be brought to see it, that if the zeal of Christians is not pointed to its proper end,—or, pointed to whatever end,—if it prompts them to transgress or vilify the everlasting laws of truth, equity, and charity ;—or, if it bor-

rows

rows its assistance from the pride and wrath of man, it will bring infallibly disgrace on the cause which they espouse, and tempt an unbelieving world to *blaspheme the name of God and his doctrine*, for their sake.

4th, You will meet with some,—may the Lord increase their number ! who are not only sincere in the profession of religion, but whose religion is of a scriptural and substantial kind, directed by the *wisdom which cometh from above*, and productive of those *fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God*. To deal with such, you will find to be the easiest and sweetest part of your employment. All you have to do, is to comfort and confirm them in their well chosen course ; and to prompt them to proceed to farther progress and improvement in the virtues of the Christian life.

I have thus, Sir, taken the freedom to lay before you a general sketch of the different characters which you will meet

with in the exercise of your profession, in this place ; and the same is probably the case in every other populous community. You will find, no doubt, a great variety included under each of these ; as likewise a variety of special obligations arising from the different situations of your people ; from their age, their fortune, the business in which they are employed, their mutual relations to each other, and the like. To each of these, you will find it of importance to adapt the instructions of the gospel, inculcating on each of them their respective and peculiar obligations, and pointing out their peculiar danger and mistakes. This, you will remember, the apostle Paul, in the directions which he gives to Titus *, expressly calls *the things which become sound doctrine*, which therefore, he says, a minister should speak.

But your own observation and experience, the Holy Bible, which is always to

* Titus ii. 1.

be your guide, the conduct and assistance of the Master whom you serve, and on whom, I hope, you will constantly depend; these must lead you to a more particular and full discernment of the methods, by which you are to discharge the commission he has given you, and *to make full proof of your ministry.* To his blessing and direction, in the service of the gospel, in this place, I most sincerely recommend you.

be your guide, the comfort of your assistance
 whom, I hope, you will constantly de-
 pend; that must find you in a more par-
 ticular and full statement of the method,
 by which you are to be directed; the con-
 mission he has given you, and to work in
 power of your calling. To his blessing and
 assistance, I most heartily recommend
 this place.

I T only now remain that I address my-
 self to you, of this congregation, of
 whom the minister, admitted in your pre-
 sence, is to have the oversight.
 My brethren, the qualifications of a
 minister are indeed of great importance in
 the success of the gospel, and the welfare
 of the people committed to his charge.
 But I would request you to consider, that
 this alone is not sufficient. You must have
 will to be devoted to give a faithful testi-
 mony to his calling, and to make a faithful
 application.

**THE
CHARGE
TO THE
CONGREGATION.**

IT only now remains that I address myself to you, of this congregation, of whom the minister, admitted in your presence, is to have the oversight.

My brethren, the qualifications of a minister are indeed of great importance to the success of the gospel, and the welfare of the people committed to his charge. But I would request you to consider, that this alone is not sufficient. You must likewise be disposed to give a suitable reception to his ministry, and to make a suitable

application of it to yourselves. It is one of the evils to be lamented in these times, that though much attention is bestowed, and prodigious zeal expressed, about the manner in which it is thought a minister should be elected to the sacred office, yet small attention is bestowed, and very little zeal expressed, about the use that should be made of a gospel ministry, and the improvement of it to the purposes for which it was designed. Were the bulk of Christians half as attentive and solicitous about the last of these, as they are about the first, we should see many noble fruits arising from it in their lives.

A variety of directions might be offered you, on this occasion, suitable to the design of our present meeting; but, after you have been detained so long, I shall only take the freedom to suggest a few particulars, adapted to the circumstances of religion in this place, as I took the opportunity to hint a few remarks to your mini-

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ster himself with relation to the circumstances of his ministry.

First, then, Let me earnestly exhort you to attend on the instructions of your minister, and to receive the message of the gospel from him. It cannot be denied, the thing is obvious to every one, that indifference about the public worship and instructions of the gospel; that frequent unnecessary, and with some, habitual absence from the house of God, is the growing temper of the times in which we live; and, I am sorry to observe, (but, in my present situation, integrity obliges me) that this is more especially to be remarked among those whom Providence has raised to affluence and prosperity. So far as this evil prevails, and spreads its influence, it must frustrate the intentions of a gospel ministry. Against this evil, therefore, suffer me, with all humility and earnestness, to exhort you of this congregation. You have expressed a particular concern to have

a stated minister to instruct you from the place where I now stand; and many of you have expressed a particular desire to have the minister who has been just now admitted to the charge. Be consistent, I beseech you, with yourselves, and observe that conduct towards him, now that he is come among you, by which alone he can be of any service to you, in the exercise of his profession. And let it not be said of any of you, that after all the concern you have expressed, for the admission of your minister, you, nevertheless, on every frivolous pretence, withdraw from his instructions, and treat his ministry as a thing of no sort of value or significance.

2d, When you do attend upon the instructions of the gospel, let it be with such dispositions as are necessary to your receiving real profit and improvement from them. Come not to this house of God from an idle curiosity, or with a view to be amused. Consider not the lessons of
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religion as a matter of present entertainment, or a trial of the preacher's skill, and with no higher a reflexion on the instructions which are given, than how the preacher has acquitted himself in his discourse. This is evidently to *bear the word, not as the word of God, but as the word of man*; in which way it will never edify or save your souls.

The message of the gospel is entitled to a very different regard. It is a matter that concerns yourselves,—that concerns your highest, your eternal interests.—It is the term of your acceptance with your Maker,—and the rule by which you shall be judged at his tribunal; of which, therefore, with a deep attention and solicitude, you should make the proper application to yourselves, and the state of your immortal souls. In this way you treat the business of every other profession. When you consult a lawyer, it is not to be amused with an eloquent or curious dissertation
on

on the law, or to give your opinion of his address and skill, but to be directed and assisted in your own particular case; and you always esteem the information, which he offers, in proportion to the light and assistance which it gives you to secure that interest about which you have consulted him. When you apply to a physician, it is not to be amused with agreeable descriptions of the nature and effects of medicine, but to learn the nature and the remedy of your own particular disease; and you value the prescriptions which he gives in proportion as they assist you to effectuate the cure. What is the reason of this conduct?—The reason is, that in these matters you are serious, and in earnest.—But whenever you are in earnest in religion, you will view the ministry of the gospel in the very same light, and your treatment of it will be the same.

3d, Encourage your minister to deal impartially and fairly with you, in delivering

ing the message of the gospel, and in declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Beware of ignorant and sinful prejudice, or a rash aversion to any useful instructions that are given you, though they should not be to your particular taste, or framed according to your favourite conceptions. Remember that the people of Jerusalem were astonished at the doctrine of our Saviour, because *he taught not as the Scribes*, the popular and applauded preachers of the times. Look always to your Bibles, from thence judge, to the best of your ability, and from thence alone, what are the lessons which your minister should give you.

More especially, beware of those fatal prejudices which arise from the bad passions of the heart, which it is the purpose of the gospel to destroy; but which you perhaps are unwilling to observe or to control. Remember that it is the business of a minister, (and a noble one it is, if God should
bless

bles him with success) to teach men the knowledge of themselves, to lay open to their view the corruptions of their own hearts, and those iniquities of life which are possibly concealed even from themselves. The more a minister does this, with the modesty and meekness of the gospel, the more he merits your esteem, the greater proof he gives of his sincerity and candour in the service of his master, and of his real friendship and love for you. Remember too, that those instructions may be sometimes the most unpopular, and give the least pleasure and enjoyment to the hearers, which however are the usefulest and best, and the most profitable for them to hear. The apostle Paul, it would appear, had made himself unpopular among the Christians at Galatia, because he had given them a faithful representation of the gospel, * *Am I therefore, says he, become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?*

* Gal. iv. 16.

4th, Consider, that a close attendance on the instructions of the gospel, and a serious improvement of them, to the purposes for which they are designed, is the most substantial proof that you can give of that affection which is due from the people to their minister. A faithful minister of Christ will not think much of any other token of regard, if this is wanting. He would rather wish to see one single person, among those who are committed to his care, listening, with a silent reverence, to the instructions which he gives, and improving them aright, than to receive from an hundred others, who are differently disposed, the loudest expressions of applause. Nothing, like this, will give your minister a thorough comfort and encouragement in the difficult and laborious work he has undertaken in your behalf. He is come from an easy, to a painful and laborious charge: and your kindness and humanity, would, I believe, incline you to

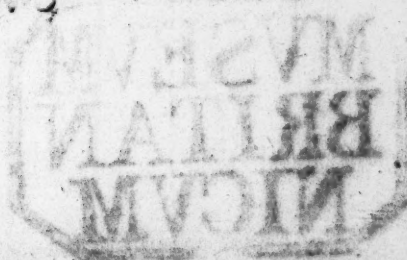
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encourage and support him in his work. Listen then, with seriousness and candour, to the message of the gospel which he brings; improve it to the purposes of real piety and holiness; let him be able to observe this seal of his ministry among you. *This will be his joy, his glory, and the crown of his rejoicing.*

5th, I add, in the last place, what, no doubt, your own thoughts have previously suggested: offer up your friendly and affectionate requests to God, for the success of your minister. Neither you nor he, are, of yourselves, sufficient for the things which have been recommended to you. Your sufficiency, and his sufficiency, are both from God. Your minister will often and seriously pray for you;—do you also often and seriously pray for him. To the divine influence and blessing I most sincerely recommend you. ‘Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead

'dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shep-
'herd of the sheep, through the blood
'of the everlasting Covenant, make you
'perfect, in every good work, to do his
'will, working in you that which is well
'pleasing in his sight, through Jesus
'Christ: to whom be glory, for ever and
'ever.' Amen.

F I N I S.



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